

23 Dec 2020:UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: POPULATION

1. Health data shows India doesn't need a two-child policy: PCI

Context:

- The data from phase-1 of the **National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5)** has revealed that India is making good strides in population control.
- The international non-profit organization Population Council of India upon analysis of the data has appreciated India's progress.

Details:

- The population metrics like total fertility rate, replacement level fertility which indicate the population dynamics are showing signs of optimism.
- The Indian Prime Minister during his speech at the 2019 Independence Day had expressed that population control was a form of patriotism.
- The country's population is finding a balance as per the latest reports of the NFHS-5 data.

What does the survey reveal?

- The survey reports plenty of evidence of usage of modern contraceptives in both rural and urban areas.
 - **Total fertility rate**
 - The total fertility rate in a specific year is defined as the total number of children that would be born to each woman if she were to live to the end of her child-bearing years and give birth to children in alignment with the prevailing age-specific fertility rates.
 - The total fertility rate has decreased across 14 of 17 states and is at 2.1 children per woman or less.
 - **Replacement level fertility**
 - Replacement level fertility is the level of fertility at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next.
 - As per the survey, most Indian states have attained the replacement level fertility.

Conclusion

- India has shown that through awareness generation and increasing access to modern contraceptives, the population has stabilized. Thus the need to have a coerced family planning is not the need of the hour.
- Another encouraging data is the improvement over the preceding two **NFHS surveys**, i.e, NFHS-3 and 4 where it was observed that there was a slump in the usage of modern methods of contraceptives and this has been reversed as per the recent NFHS survey.

2. States told to update Census register

Context:

- The Registrar General of India (RGI), which is responsible for carrying out the decennial census exercise, has communicated to all state coordinators to update the names of area, locality, colony, building in the “charge register”.
- Charge register is an important census document that will help enumerators to collect details during the first phase of Census-House Listing and Housing Census and the National Population Register (NPR).

Details:

- The census exercise was suspended indefinitely owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. The communication from RGI may be an indication that the census exercise may take off in the near future.
- The charge register gives the picture of the structure of workflow, delegation and distribution of work among enumerators.
- It also marks the House Listing Blocks (HLB) to be visited by each official.
- Each HLB is a primary unit of collection of data.
- The register will also be used for the fieldwork with respect to the updating of NPR, as the same functionaries will be deployed for both the exercises.

National Population Register

- The NPR is a register of the usual residents of the country. It is prepared at the local (village and sub-town), sub-district, district, state and national levels under provisions of the Citizenship Act, 1955 and the Citizenship (Registration of Citizens and Issue of National Identity Cards) Rules, 2003.
- NPR was first collected in 2010 and then updated in 2015.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: HEALTH

1. No appetite in rural India for paid vaccines, finds survey

Context:

- The survey was carried out to elicit a response from the rural areas about the COVID-19 vaccines.

Details:

- A survey was conducted by Gaon Connection, a rural media platform, titled the 'COVID-19 Vaccine and Rural India' survey.
- The survey was conducted in as many as 60 districts spread across 16 states and a union territory.
- The survey was based on face-to-face interaction about the impression of the vaccine in the rural region.
- The survey tried to collect information about who is to be given priority, should the vaccine be free, etc.

Takeaways from the survey

- Around 44% of the respondents expressed their willingness to pay for the vaccination against COVID-19 while 36% categorically stated that they would not pay for it.
- The respondents were asked if given an opportunity, who within the households deserved priority for vaccination. One-third of the respondents chose to give priority to their old parents.
- Another question that was asked was, who should the government give priority when the vaccination drive begins. The answer among 43.5% was that the first priority should be given to doctors and nurses.

Miscellaneous data from the survey

- The survey revealed that there was an increase in money spent on products like immunity booster products like Vitamin tablets, chywanprash, giloy, etc.
- The food habits have also seen a change, with 70% of the respondents having stopped eating outside, while there was a shift to eating more vegetables and fruits.

2. 20 flyers from U.K test positive

Context:

- The news of the emergence of a new strain in the United Kingdom (UK) has created panic among other countries, thus forcing them to take mitigative measures to prevent the spread of the new strain.

Details:

- India and several other countries have temporarily suspended air travel with the UK.
- India is currently taking precautions such as making RT-PCR tests mandatory and also a separate unit for those diagnosed with the new strain of coronavirus.

The new strain

- The new variant, VUI-202012/01, has accounted for nearly 60% of all cases in London by mid-December.

- The new variant is thought to be 70% more transmissible than earlier versions of the coronavirus.
- Scientists are still researching on the effects, virulence and severity of the new strain.
- Concerns have been raised over the nature and location of the mutation. The mutation was at the receptor-binding domain of the spike protein, which the virus uses to enter the human body. This protein is also one of the targets of vaccines currently being developed.
- But experts are of the opinion that vaccines would remain effective despite the mutation, because the immune response generated is against the complete surface, so even in case there is a change in a particular point the vaccine still remains effective.

Conclusion

- The RT-PCR tests have been made compulsory on arrival and in case of a positive sample, it is recommended that spike gene-based RT-PCR test should also be performed by an appropriate laboratory.
- The onus is on the government and the people; increased surveillance and monitoring from the government should be complemented by people following necessary precautions.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. Western Ghats home to 3,387 leopards

Context:

- The Status of Leopards in India 2018 report was released. It revealed that the Western Ghats was home to close to 3,387 leopards.

Details:

- The population of leopards in India has gone up by 60 per cent, as per the 'Status of Leopard in India 2018' report.
- India now has 12,852 leopards, witnessing a substantial increase in comparison to the 2014 data.

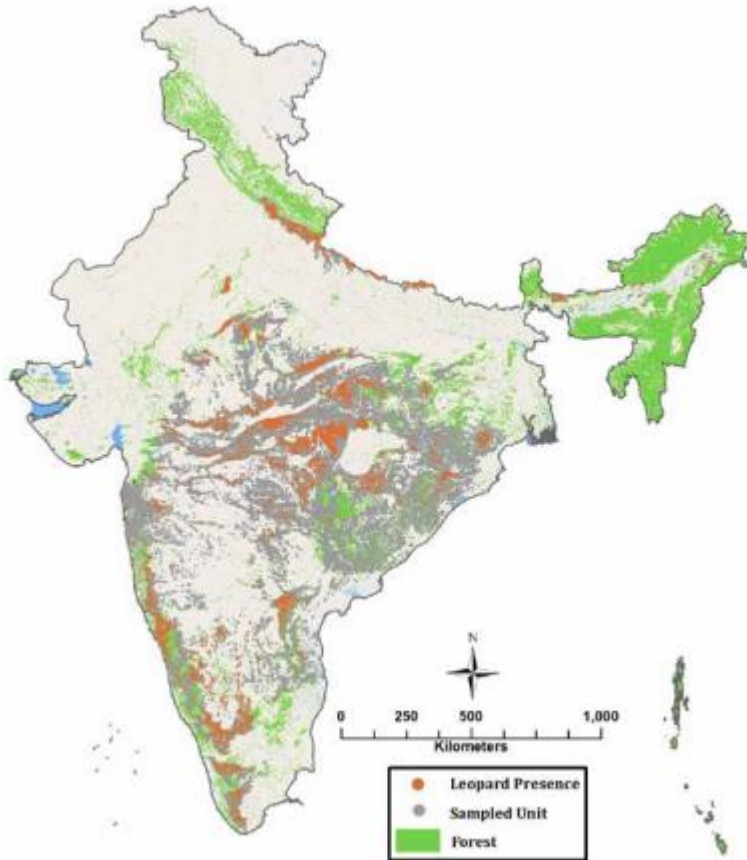
Leopards in India

- The leopard population was counted during the tiger population assessment undertaken in 2018. The leopard population was estimated to be within the forested habitats in tiger occupied states.

Habitat

- The maximum population of wild Indian leopards are found in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and Assam.

- The most popular national parks in India to spot wild leopards are Nagarhole National Park, Jim Corbett National Park, Rajaji National Park, Mouling National Park, Gir Forest National Park, Sariska Wildlife Sanctuary, Bandipur National Park and Kanha National Park.



Western Ghats

Leopard population of the Western Ghats landscape was reported from four distinct blocks.

1. *The Northern block*

- The contiguous forests of Radhanagari and Goa covering Haliyal Kali Tiger Reserve, Karwar, Honnavar, Madikeri, Kudremukh, Shettihali Wild Life Sanctuary (WLS), Bhadra and Chikmagalur.

2. *The Central population*

- This region covered southern Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and northern Kerala covering the forests of Virajpet, Nagarhole, Bandipur, Mudumalai, Satyamangalam, Nilgiris, Silent Valley, Wayanad, BRT Hills, MM Hills, Cauvery WLS, Bannerghatta National Park.

3. *A second central cluster*

- Covering central Kerala and Tamil Nadu comprising the Parambikulam, Anamalai, Eravikulam, Vazachal population.

4. *The Southern leopard population*

- Covers regions of southern Kerala and Tamil Nadu comprising the forests of Periyar, Kalakad, Mundanthurai, and Kanyakumari.

•

Camera traps

- Camera traps were used to obtain leopards' photographs in the Western Ghats.
- The images helped in the identification of 1,681 adults and sub-adults.
- The report sought to balance the optimism due to the rise in the leopard population in the tiger reserves of the Western Ghats with the caution of an increasing trend of leopard-human conflict in the region.

Conclusion

- The report highlights India's progress in biodiversity conservation, with the leopard population now joining the tiger and the lion population to have witnessed an increase in numbers.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ECONOMY

1. Delaying the inevitable

Context:

- The Union Government has extended the moratorium on critical provisions of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) till March 2021.

Details:

- The Covid-19 pandemic and the lockdown meant that the economy went into a downward spiral with economic activities ranging across a number of sectors suffering.
- The economy was grounded to a halt with the lockdown causing immense stress to the business enterprises.

Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)

- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code 2016, enacted to radically change the process of insolvency resolution in India.
- The IBC provided a specialized forum to oversee all insolvency and liquidation proceedings for individuals, SMEs and corporates.

Pandemic induced worries

- The lockdown increased the pressure on the distressed Indian markets, MSME and other small-scale business operations.
- The government has taken stock of the situation and measures are being adopted by in the form of relief packages and legal amendments to deal with the already distressed market and for further strengthening the debt-resolution regime and ease of doing business.

Steps taken by Government

1. ***Threshold of loan defaults***
 - The threshold for loan defaults was increased from Rs.1 lakh to Rs.1 crore in March.
2. ***Suspension of certain provisions of IBC***
 - An ordinance was issued in June to bar the creditors from setting into motion insolvency proceedings for defaults arising from march 25th. The ordinance stated that the moratorium could be possibly extended for a year.
 - The ordinance had set the suspension of IBC provisions up to 25th of December 2020, but the Finance Minister has announced that moratorium will complete its full cycle of one year.

Economy recovery

- The extension of suspension suggests that the economy is still a long way off from recovery.
- The optimism showed by some due to the second quarter data of just 7.6% contraction in comparison to the first quarter data of 23.2% contraction, the 0.6% manufacturing output expansion and the claims of a V-shaped recovery will have to be tempered.
- The government has to identify sectors that need fiscal support, enterprises in these sectors have to be shielded and sheltered from exiting the market.
- The small and medium enterprises will take a longer road to recovery, they would be better off if the government raises the default threshold limit a little higher.
- But the blanket suspension of IBC could burden the banks and could hurt future credit dispersal to the industry.
- The blanket suspension of IBC could clog the path of business enterprises who voluntarily want to exit, the pandemic has changed certain businesses will be carried out in the future, thus several enterprises will not find it viable and thus need an exit.

- The absence of a voluntary exit may lead to the loss in value of the assets, causing even more distress to the borrower and lender.

Conclusion:

- The government needs to adopt a more balanced approach that benefits the banks, businesses and the economy.
- The aim should be to arrive at a mechanism that would lead to a smooth restructuring and recovery of loans, a blanket suspension of IBC will not benefit in the longer run.

Category: HEALTH

1. Pandemic resilience

Context:

- The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs has unequivocally called for a broad, all-inclusive Public Health Act.

Details:

- The committee's recommendation has been in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The pandemic has exposed India's health system of its inadequacies, in terms of investment in the health sector, lack of infrastructure, exploitation by the private sector etc.

Status of the health system in India.

- The public health system is plagued with a shortage of manpower, absence of quality infrastructure, absence of accountability mechanism, inefficiency etc.
- The above factors have forced the people to knock on the doors of private healthcare, this has been more conspicuous in the rural areas.
- The private health system has not been kind on economically vulnerable segments of the population.
- The lack of regulatory oversight, rampant corruption, exorbitant costs has been a constant feature of the private health system.
- The pandemic exposed the vulnerabilities of both public and private healthcare.

Issues

1. *Public Health Act*

- The panel was of the opinion that the present legal mechanisms are not robust to curb the malpractices that are widely prevalent in private healthcare.

- Thus, the panel has called for a comprehensive Public Health Act that obligates the private healthcare establishments to adhere to the regulatory standards.
2. *Cashless treatment*
- Extremely profit-motivated private enterprises have been known to insist on cash payment. This excessive commercial nature of the healthcare system has made the panel recommend allowing cashless treatment for COVID-19 for people who are covered by insurance.
 - This will be a major relief to patients suffering from COVID-19 and their families, especially when out of pocket expenditure is responsible for driving millions into poverty each year.
3. *Insurance*
- Private hospitals refused to admit COVID-19 patients even when insured, this caused a financial strain on the families at a time when pandemic induced lockdown was squeezing the disposable income.
 - The panel saw this behaviour of hospitals as a breach of trust and abdication of the responsibility on behalf of the hospitals.
 - Another observation noted by the panel is the rise in the premium costs of insurance in the COVID times, especially for the senior citizens.
 - The IRDAI, the insurance regulator has set the bar at 65 years for getting a standard policy, this has further exacerbated the concerns of the uninsured older senior citizen.

Reforms suggested.

- A tax-funded system will help create an equitable framework, the government in this system will assume the role of a single and sole payer to care providers.
- The above scheme of things was suggested by the erstwhile Planning Commission.
- The Government as a single-payer would be better equipped to resist the commercial pressures in determining the costs.
- This model can also be replicated in matters of central procurement of essential drugs, which can then be distributed free of costs.

Way forward

- Universal state-provided health services under a right-based, non-exclusionary framework, implemented by states will be needed to make quality health truly accessible and affordable.
- The implementation of the recommendations of the panel along with addressing the lacunae in the health system will go a long way in making the right to health a fully legal and justiciable right.

Category: ENVIRONMENT

1. Five years since Paris, an opportunity to build back better.

Context:

- The Paris agreement completed its fifth anniversary in December 2020.

Details:

- There have been questions raised over the importance of climate-related goals amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.
- However, some feel that the pandemic has given an opportunity to remodel growth strategies and make 'green growth' central' to such strategies, the virus should not be allowed to derail climate actions.

The European Green Deal

- It is a new growth model and aims to achieve climate neutrality in the EU. By 2050, Europe wants to become the world's first climate-neutral continent.
- The deal is a series of goals and initiatives announced by the European Commission.
- During the coronavirus pandemic, economic activity slowed, causing a reduction in carbon emissions but leaving the EU facing recession. The European Parliament called for an ambitious recovery plan with the Green Deal at its core.
- In response, the European Commission came up with Next Generation EU, a €750 billion recovery plan.
- To add to this an additional financial outlay of half a trillion euros have been earmarked to tackle climate change in the budget.

The roadmap to carbon-neutral 2050.

- A pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% compared to the 1990 levels by 2030.
- The pledge also deals with driving down the cost of low-carbon technologies by driving up demand and accompanied by increased investment in Research and Development (R&D).
- The cost of photovoltaics has already declined by close to 82% in the last decade, driving down of cost is important to substitute carbon-intensive technologies with green technologies.
- Further estimates have revealed that by achieving the 55% target, will help save a humongous 100 billion in a decade and a possible trillion by the year 2050.

EU-India collaboration

- Climate change is no longer a national problem, it is a global threat, therefore it requires countries working in unison to achieve climate goals and save the planet.
- The ambitions of the EU are matched by the potential of India and together they will be crucial to plans of achieving the global climate goals.
- The EU and India are fully behind the goals enshrined in the Paris Agreement, this commitment is not just expressed through words and declarations but have been backed by actions on ground.
 - ***India's renewable energy push.***
 - India's renewable energy capacity addition has been on an upward trend in the last couple of years.
 - Installed solar capacity had increased to 36 gigawatts in 2020.
 - India's renewable energy capacity is currently listed in the fourth position globally and is expected to reach as high as 175 GW by 2022.
- India has also been proactive in institution building in the global arena, this can be seen in India's pioneering efforts in building the International Solar Alliance at the Paris CoP-15.
- India also played a significant role in the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure and Leadership Group for Industry Transition.

The promise of Paris Agreement

- The Paris Agreement seeks to limit the rise in global temperatures within 2 degrees Celsius.
- This requires cooperation and coordination at a global scale to achieve the targets, it is very important that the countries come up with strategies, plans for net-zero emissions for 2030.
- The next decade will be pivotal to the dreams of carbon-neutral 2050, there is a responsibility on the developed countries over climate financing.
- The steps towards achieving the Paris agreement will receive impetus if the growth strategies adopted by countries post the pandemic embraces 'green growth'.
- The countries need to explore green pathways that focus on low carbon intensity, energy efficiency, renewable energy etc.

Way forward

- The climate change ill-effects can be mitigated if the recovery plans at the level of individual, local, national, regional and international focus on building back better.
- The climate change actions cannot be just governments led, it requires more active ownership at the grassroots levels.
- The target is to synergize the efforts of governments, academicians, business people, policymakers, civic society actors and citizens to work towards a safer planet.

- Each generation has an inherent responsibility to leave behind a better world than what it inherited.

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following countries border Nigeria?

1. Mauritania
2. Cameroon
3. Ghana
4. Chad

Choose the correct option:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c



Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. Leopards are classified by IUCN as 'Critically Endangered'.
2. The Northeast landscape is home to the maximum number of leopards in India.

Choose the correct option:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Leopards are classified as 'Vulnerable' by IUCN.
- Leopards are in maximum number in the Western Ghats region.

Q3. The Copenhagen consensus is related to which of the following?

- a. An agreement signed at the 2009 Copenhagen Conference of Parties (CoP 15)
- b. An agreement signed by all the European countries with regards to internet governance in Europe
- c. Deals with food fortification
- d. None of the above

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Copenhagen consensus deals with micronutrient fortification of basic food items with iodine and iron and is an incredibly cheap, simple intervention that saves lives.

Q4. Mouling National Park is located in

- a. Assam
- b. Goa
- c. Arunachal Pradesh
- d. Sikkim

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Mouling National Park is located in Arunachal Pradesh.
- Temperate alpine and coniferous forest at the upper reaches whereas the lower area is covered with tropical evergreen forest.
- Ornamental plants like foxtail, orchids are abundant in this area.
- The park has also an impressive area of animals and birds. Many endangered species like takins, snow clouded leopard, golden langur, hornbill are spotted here.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Explain the salient features of the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC) 2016, and critically analyze the other alternatives available to deal with insolvency and bankruptcy during the suspension of certain provisions of IBC. (15 marks, 250 words)[GS3, Economy]
2. "India has done well in wildlife conservation with an increase in populations of tigers, lions, leopards in recent times." In light of the above statement, discuss the measures taken towards wildlife conservation and suggest measures to improve it. (15 marks, 250 words)[GS3, Environment]

