

02 Nov 2019: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: ECONOMY

1. Beijing can slap tariffs of \$3.6 on U.S. goods: WTO

Context:

A World Trade Organization arbitrator has authorised China to slap tariffs on U.S. imports worth up to \$3.58 billion annually over U.S. anti-dumping practices.

Details:

- In this specific case, China alleged that the United States, in violation of WTO rules, was continuing a practice known as “zeroing”, which calculates the price of imports compared to the normal value in the U.S. to determine predatory pricing.
- This practice of the USA, claimed by it to be an anti-dumping duty to protect its domestic manufacturers had resulted in very high levies on Chinese imports making them uncompetitive in the US market.
- The WTO ruling has determined that the illegal U.S. anti-dumping practices had caused “nullification or impairment of benefits accruing to China” to the tune of \$3,579.128 million, and that Beijing could impose tariffs on goods not exceeding that amount per year.”
- The decision marks the first time the WTO has authorised China to impose tariffs in a trade dispute.

Category: SECURITY

1. ‘WhatsApp did not inform govt. of system breach’

Context:

WhatsApp has stated that some Indian users of WhatsApp came under surveillance using an Israeli spyware.

Background:

- WhatsApp in October 2019 sued the NSO Group, an Israeli surveillance firm and developers of Pegasus, which is reportedly behind the technology that helped unnamed entities hack into roughly 1,400 devices across at least 20 countries, including India, Bahrain, Mexico and UAE. Indian users were among those impacted by the spyware.
- The NSO Group is an Israeli technology firm, which claims on its website that its products are used “exclusively” by government intelligence and law enforcement agencies “to fight crime and terror”.

Concerns:

- WhatsApp has over 1.5 billion users globally, of which India alone accounts for about 400 million. The vulnerability of the users to such spying is of grave concern with regard to breach of their privacy.
- Government has stated that WhatsApp failed to inform the government of a breach of its system despite being legally bound to do so under Section 70(B) of the IT Act. They are legally bound to inform (computer emergency response team) CERT or any other relevant government agencies about the details of such attacks on Indian citizens.
- Despite WhatsApp arguing that they had given information to CERT-IN, the government has stated that it was a communication in pure technical jargon without any mention of Pegasus or the extent of breach. Thus the information shared was only about a technical vulnerability but nothing on the fact that privacy of Indian users had been compromised. Lack of clarity on this issue shows the loopholes in the current processes.
- The government has been blamed for trying to use the spyware to target specific people. However the government has stated that government agencies operate strictly as per provisions of law and a well-established protocol for interception.
- Government has claimed that reports of breach of privacy of Indian citizens on WhatsApp were attempts to malign the government and are completely misleading. The episode has taken up a political tone.

Way forward:

- Need to safeguard the privacy of millions of Indian citizens should be the first

priority. Need to address the loopholes in the current law and processes. The intermediaries need to follow the law not just in words but spirit also. Need to keep privacy of the users above commercial interests.

- Though there are provisions were the government is allowed to intercept for collecting intelligence there is a need to ensure that any such attempts are as per the provisions of law and laid out protocols and there is no scope for misuse. To ensure that there are adequate safeguards to ensure that no innocent citizen is harassed or his privacy breached.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Health emergency declared in the capital

Context:

The Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority has declared a public health emergency in the National Capital as pollution levels have entered the 'severe plus' category.

Details:

- According to the official data provided by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), the overall Air quality Index (AQI) score of Delhi was 504 placing it in the 'severe plus' category.
- This has to be considered as a public health emergency as it will have adverse health impacts on all, particularly the children. Hospitals have also reported a rise in respiratory and eye problems. People are facing symptoms associated with pollution like irritation in the eyes and throat, dry skin, skin allergies, chronic cough and breathlessness.

Causes:

- EPCA has stated that the deterioration in air quality is due to a combination of accumulated toxins because of local pollution, further spiked by bursting of crackers on Deepavali, stubble burning and extremely adverse weather conditions. Stubble burning contribution to pollution has gone up to 45%, resulting in the current high particulate matter concentration.

Actions suggested:

- Implementing Graded Response Action Plan and other measures.
- The agency advised people to minimise their outdoor activities during the period especially the asthmatic patients, elderly and kids.

- Construction activities have been banned till further notice.
- The Delhi government on Friday announced that all schools in the Capital would be closed till November 5 due to public health emergency declared by the Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority.
- Delhi govt. issued notification on odd-even implementation and has stated that violators will be booked under Motor vehicles Act compoundable with fine.

2. Burning of stubble down 40%, SC told

Context:

The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has informed the Supreme Court that incidents of stubble burning in the three States neighbouring Delhi and the National Capital Region have come down by 41% since 2016.

Details:

- Following the severe air pollution issue in the NCR and the contribution of stubble burning in the neighbouring states to this problem, special central schemes, having a total outlay of ₹1151.8 crore, have been rolled out to tackle air pollution and for in-situ management of crop residue and promotion of agriculture mechanisation. This is as stated in the Ministry's affidavit to the court.
- The affidavit states that the machines to manage crop residue were disbursed among individual farmers for 50% subsidy and 80% discount were given for setting up of custom hiring centres for these machines.
- Incentive schemes to achieve zero stubble burning have been introduced at the Pradhan, gram Panchayat and village levels. The ministry claims that these measures have led to the decrease in stubble burning activity

Concern:

- Stubble burning has continued. The scale of it is still large enough to severely affect the pollution in surrounding areas and particularly the NCR. EPCA has stated that stubble burning contribution to pollution in Delhi has gone up to 45%.

Category: AGRICULTURE

1. Rain drowns hopes of Kuttanad farmers

Context:

Hundreds of farmers are staring at huge losses as large tracts of fields with harvest-ready crops remain submerged after incessant rain. The Region is facing loss in the second crop

season for the second year in a row.

Additional Information:

- Kuttanad Wetland Agriculture System is unique, as it is the only system in India that favours rice cultivation below sea level in the land created by draining delta swamps in brackish waters.
- It is designated as globally important agricultural heritage system. It envisages an approach to cope with the imminent climate impacts in coastal areas and evolve efficient methods to deal with soil availability and flood issues in agriculture.
- It is facing severe pollution of waters due to tourism and the use of chemicals. The protection of this fragile and unique system from any external pressure is important and urgent for humanity as it is essential for maintaining and enhancing so much endemic biodiversity and several vital ecosystem services for human well-being worldwide.

D. GS4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ART AND CULTURE

1. Unearthing an ancient civilisation

This topic has been dealt with in 20th September Comprehensive News Analysis. Click here to read.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Cramped prisons

Context:

National Crime Records Bureau has released the “Prison Statistics India – 2017”.

Key highlights of the report:

- Indian jails continue to remain congested and overcrowded with an average occupancy rate of 115% of their capacity.
- In 16 of the 28 States covered in the report, occupancy rate was higher than 100%. Uttar Pradesh (165%), Chhattisgarh (157.2%), Delhi (151.2%) and Sikkim (140.7%) fared the worst.
- More than 68% of those imprisoned are undertrials, indicating that a majority were

poor and were unable to execute bail bonds or provide sureties.

- Out of the total number of prisoners, the number of Convicts, undertrial inmates and detenues account for 30.9 %, 68.5 % and 0.5 % respectively. Other prisoners account for 0.2% of total prisoners.
- A total of 378 prisoners escaped from lawful custody during 2017.
- The number of deaths in prisons has increased marginally by 5.49% in 2017 when compared to 2015.
- Gujarat has the highest number of undertrial prisoners who are Pakistani nationals. The state has 59 Pakistani undertrial prisoners out of the total 101 overseas prisoners in the state. Jammu and Kashmir has the second-highest Pakistani national undertrials at 35.

Concerns:

- Despite the Supreme Court and other institutions regularly raising the issue of prison reforms and decongestion in jails, it is evident that the measures taken have been piecemeal in most States.
- While overall occupancy rates have come down from 140% in 2007 to 115% in 2017, only a few States have, in this period, gone about building more jails or increasing capacity in prisons in line with the changes in inmate population.
- The vacant posts in the jail administration constitute another major challenge for prisons across the country.

Way forward:

- In its 268th report in May 2017, the Law Commission, highlighted the inconsistencies in the bail system as one of the key reasons for overcrowding in prisons. Expediting the trial process for such prisoners is the most important endeavour, but short of this there are ways to decongest prisons by granting relief to under trials.
 - The Commission recommended that those detained for offences that come with a punishment of up to seven years of imprisonment should be released on completing one-third of that period and for those charged with offences that attract a longer jail term, after they complete half of that period.
 - For those who have spent the whole period as undertrials, the period undergone should be considered for remission.
 - It also recommended that the police should avoid needless arrests, while magistrates should refrain from mechanical remand orders.

- It is imperative that these recommendations are incorporated into law soonest.
- Lessons from Tamil Nadu:
 - Some States such as Tamil Nadu have reduced their prison occupancy rate (to 61.3%) by increasing the number of jails and their capacity.
 - Besides increasing the jails and their capacity, steps have been taken for reducing arrests for actions unless there is a cognisable offence made out.
- Prison statistics provide information on the kind of facilities available for reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners, robust policies must be formulated, which would ensure successful reintegration of prisoners and provide those serving life-term imprisonments an opportunity to reform.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The perils of post-370 diplomacy

Context:

- The government following the Amendment of Article 370, has made multiple efforts to try and contain the international fallout of the move.

Background:

- In the weeks following the government's decision to amend Article 370 and divide Jammu and Kashmir into two separate Union Territories, the government sent out a number of diplomatic missions worldwide to try and contain the international fallout of the move.
- The concerted efforts by the government met with mixed results. India has been able to avoid a public statement by UNSC and passing of a Pakistan backed resolution in the United Nations human rights council.
- Members of the European Parliament appeared to endorse India's actions, but German Chancellor Merkel's characterisation of the situation of Kashmiris being "unsustainable", during her Delhi trip will be worrying for the government.
- At the UN General Assembly in September, only three countries other than Pakistan, referred to the post-370 fallout in J&K: China, Malaysia and Turkey.
- Apart from the need to control the international messaging over Kashmir with tactical diplomacy, it is also necessary for the government to carefully consider the larger impact on Indian foreign policy that has resulted from its actions leading up to, and subsequent to the amendment of Article 370 of the Constitution.

Changes:

The internationalisation of the Kashmir issue points to troubling diversions from India's traditional foreign policy. Three tenets of India's foreign policy, in particular, appear to have been violated:

- The issue of Kashmir has been "internationalised" in a manner not seen in decades, at least since the early 1990s when violence in the State was at a peak.
- The second tenet is the "hyphenation with Pakistan" that New Delhi has always sought to avoid. Under this policy, India managed to separate its policies in J&K from its relationship with Pakistan and dealing with terror emanating from there. However now events in Kashmir are increasingly conflated with fears of an India-Pakistan conflict.
- The third tenet being challenged now is India's traditional rejection of "mediation by third parties", with more and more countries offering to mediate between India and Pakistan.

Concerns:

- What makes these diversions from India's traditional foreign policy more troubling is they are necessitated despite the fact that India has a decided upper hand over Pakistan in the international community, and at a time Pakistan's establishment has little credibility for its own Kashmir policy and its support to terror groups.
- The government raises Pakistan as a salient point on its agenda at every international forum, including at the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) summit last week. Our main foreign policy focus has been on Pakistan resulting in less attention to other areas.
- New Delhi targets China, Turkey and Malaysia as part of its "zero sum" game with Pakistan. This seems to be hurting our bilateral relations with other countries. The recent decision to put off the PM's visit to turkey and plans to call off the business ties with companies operating in the above three countries.
- Lasting or permanent damage to "Brand India" as a democratic and pluralistic country, respected for decades as a rational power. In the U.S., for example, concerns over the government's actions post-370 are now often clubbed with questions about a changing nuclear stance (No First Use, or NFU, amendments).

Way forward:

- As the government fights all aspects of this perception battle worldwide, it is very important to control any violent aftermath once the temporary restrictions in J&K are lifted.

F. Tidbits

1. 'Women to be inducted in Army by end-2021'

- The first batch of 100 women will be inducted by end-2021 as Corps of Military Police (CMP) in the army. So far, women were being inducted only as officers and this is the first time they would be joining the Army as the soldiers or "personnel below officer rank".

2. Joblessness rises to 3-year high

- India's unemployment rate in October rose to 8.5%, the highest level since August 2016, according to data released by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). According to CMIE, the urban unemployment rate for October 2019 stood at 8.9%, slightly higher than the rural unemployment rate of 8.3%.
- The CMIE's figures are in line with the findings of the latest Periodic Labour Force Survey, which had estimated an unemployment rate of 6.1% between July 2017 and June 2018, the worst in 45 years.
- The data also comes on the back of other indicators showing a downturn in the economy.

G. Prelims Facts

1. Spain to host COP25 climate summit in December

- Spain will host the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) climate summit in December, the UN said, after Chile abandoned plans to hold it due to deadly anti-government protests. The COP25 will take place from 2-13 December in Madrid.

H. Practice Questions for UPSC Prelims Exam

Q1. Which of the following statements regarding financial action task force (FATF) are wrong?

1. It is an intergovernmental organization founded in 1989 on the initiative of the G7 to develop policies to combat money laundering.
2. India and Germany are full time members of FATF.
3. The FATF has recently placed Pakistan on its black list.

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has decided to put Pakistan on its grey list till February 2020 and directed Islamabad to take "extra measures" for "complete" elimination of terror financing and money laundering.

Q2. With which of the following countries/ unions is India negotiating a broad-based Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement?

- a. African union
- b. European Union
- c. USA
- d. United Kingdom

Answer: b

Explanation:

On 28th June 2007, India and the EU began negotiations on a broad-based Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) in Brussels, Belgium. India and the EU expect to promote bilateral trade by removing barriers to trade in goods and services and investment across all sectors of the economy. Both parties believe that a comprehensive and ambitious agreement that is consistent with WTO rules and principles would open new markets and would expand opportunities for Indian and EU businesses.

Q3. Which of the following statements are correct with regard to co-operative banks in India?

1. Cooperative banks are jointly regulated by RBI and the state government through the state registrars.
2. All eligible cooperative banks as defined in the Section 2 of the Deposit Insurance and Credit Guarantee Corporation Act, 1961 (DICGC Act) are covered under the Deposit Insurance Scheme.

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

Self-explanatory.

Q4. Which of the following countries/ waterbodies borders Germany?

1. North sea
2. Baltic sea
3. Switzerland
4. Poland

Which of the given statement/s is/are correct?

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

Answer: c

Explanation:



I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. There is a greater chance of prisoners hardening as criminals rather than of them reforming and getting rehabilitated in congested and overcrowded jails. Analyse the statement and suggest prison reforms, in the backdrop of the recently released National Crime Records Bureau's "Prison Statistics India – 2017" report. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. In the backdrop of increasing cyber security threats, elaborate on the importance of cyber security. Enumerate India's efforts to meet this emerging challenge and its effectiveness. (10 marks, 150 words)