

27 Apr 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: ECONOMY

1. [Punjab could see more areas under cotton cultivation](#)

Context:

- Effect of the Pandemic on **cropping pattern**.

Background:

- In the light of the national lockdown in place, there has been a notable **reverse migration of the agricultural labourers from Punjab to Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.**

Details:

- Agricultural experts are expecting **greater areas under cotton cultivation in Punjab and Haryana** in the following season. Initial estimates note that Punjab can see around three lakh acres of additional area under the cotton crop in the coming Kharif season.
- It is likely that there would be a **shift from paddy cultivation and other crops towards cotton cultivation.**

Causes:

Lack of labourers for paddy cultivation:

- **Paddy cultivation is labour intensive.**
- The reverse migration of agricultural labourers has led to a drastic labour shortage in Punjab.
- Labour from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have an expertise in **planting paddy** but with many of them back to their native places, paddy cultivation will go down.
- In such a situation, sowing cotton is a viable option for the farmers.

Government's push for crop diversification:

- In the light of the **ecological and environmental effects of intensive paddy cultivation** in the state of Punjab, the State government has been pushing for crop diversification.
- As part of the **crop diversification** attempts, the government has been promoting cotton sowing.
 - The Punjab Government has set a target of enhancing the area under cotton cultivation from 9.7 lakh acres last year to 12.5 lakh acres in 2020, in a bid to promote crop-diversification.
- This could aid the acreage under cotton.

Reduced demand for guar:

- There has been a **steep decline in market demand for guar.** The farmers may sow less guar crop as its **prices have remained subdued** and shift to cotton.

Additional information:

- In Punjab and Haryana, Bt cotton is sown in over 95% of the total area and the rest 5% consists of indigenous cotton varieties.
- **Cotton is a Kharif crop.**

2. Industries hobbled by curbs on mobility of men, material

Context:

- Issues faced by the industries due to restrictions during the lockdown.

Background:

- The Central Government has been planning for a **phased lifting of the lockdown measures** in place.

- The Centre has slowly been **easing restrictions**, first allowing the reopening of essential sector businesses and then permitted industries located in rural areas, as well as certain sectors including construction, information technology and hardware, to begin work subject to certain restrictions.

Details:

- A recent nationwide **Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) survey** has noted that the relaxation measures announced by the government were not sufficient for the effective functioning of the industries.
 - Almost 50% of the industries which have been allowed to reopen still face hurdles in obtaining permits to function and obtaining passes for employees.
 - Over 60% of the surveyed companies also said that the movement of inputs and finished goods is still disrupted.
 - As per the survey, the unavailability of workers or their inability to travel to the workplace was the single largest reason that prevented businesses from operating. Difficulties in transport of men and materials have created a major bottleneck for the industries.

Suggestions from the industries:

- CII has demanded that businesses should be **allowed to function without the need of permits** in non-containment areas or permits may be **granted on a self-certification basis**.
- CII suggested that employees be allowed to use their own private vehicles, and that government passes should be replaced by company letters.

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. CERT-In to conduct security audit of COVID-19 data

Context:

- Kerala Government's decision to conduct security audit of the information shared with Sprinklr.

Background:

- As part of its efforts to limit the spread of **COVID-19**, the Kerala state government had roped in the U.S.-based company, Sprinklr to analyze the personal health data collected by field-level workers from nearly 1.75 lakh people categorised as "vulnerable and potentially exposed" to the pandemic.
- The analysis of this data using **data analytics techniques and tools** was expected to **aid the government in its containment efforts** of COVID-19.
- The government had received flak for its move to use disaster management funds for procuring the healthcare worker mobile application from the firm. There have also been **privacy concerns** in involving a foreign firm and allowing it **access to sensitive data**.
- The government's move had been challenged and recently the **High Court of Kerala has come out with certain guidelines** to ensure the security of the data collected and captured in the Amazon Cloud system.

For more, refer to:

[CNA dated April 25, 2020](#)

Details:

- In the wake of the controversy, the Kerala Government has decided to carry out a security audit by CERT-In.
 - **CERT-In (Indian Computer Emergency Response Team)**, under the Union **Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology**, is the nodal agency responsible for dealing with cyber security threats.

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E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. At the edge of a new nuclear arms race

Context:

- A recent report by the U.S. State Department claimed that China has been carrying out nuclear testing against the provisions of the [Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty \(CTBT\)](#).

Background:

Partial Test-Ban Treaty (PTBT):

- The **ban on nuclear testing** is seen as a necessary first step towards **curbing the nuclear arms race**.
- In successful negotiations, a **Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) was concluded in 1963** banning underwater and atmospheric tests.
- However, this was not sufficient as the PTBT only drove testing underground and didn't decrease testing. **Cold War politics** led to continued testing by the nations, with the U.S. and Russia accounting for the most number of tests.

Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT):

- The **CTBT negotiations began in Geneva in 1994**.
- By 1994, global politics had changed dramatically. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or the USSR, broke up. The Cold War had ended and the nuclear arms race between the erstwhile USSR and the U.S. was over. In 1991, Russia declared a unilateral moratorium on testing, followed by the U.S. in 1992.
- The negotiations over the CTBT were often contentious.
 - France and China continued testing, claiming that they had conducted far fewer tests and needed to validate new designs since the CTBT did not imply an end to nuclear deterrence.
 - France and the U.S. proposed a CTBT that would permit testing at a low threshold. Civil society and the non-nuclear weapon states reacted negatively to such an idea and it was dropped.
 - After India's proposals for anchoring the CTBT in a disarmament framework did not find acceptance, in June 1996, India announced its decision to withdraw from the negotiations.

- Eventually, the idea of defining the **“comprehensive test ban”** as a **“zero yield”** test ban that would prohibit supercritical hydro-nuclear tests was accepted by the negotiating parties and adopted subsequently.
- The CTBT was adopted by a majority vote and opened for signature.
- The **Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO)**, the international organisation to verify the CTBT was established in Vienna. It runs an elaborate **verification system** built around a network of over 325 seismic, radionuclide, infrasound and hydroacoustic (underwater) monitoring stations.

Concerns with CTBT:

CTBT lacks legal authority:

- Of the 44 listed countries whose ratification is necessary for the treaty to enter into force as per the “entry-into-force” provisions, **only 36 have ratified the treaty** until now.
- China, Egypt, Iran, Israel and the U.S. have signed but not ratified. China maintains that it will only ratify it after the U.S. does.
- In addition, **North Korea, India and Pakistan are the three who have not signed**. All three have also **undertaken tests** after 1996; India and Pakistan in May 1998 and North Korea six times between 2006 and 2017.
- The **CTBT has, therefore, not entered into force and lacks legal authority**.

Unequal provisions:

- The current provisions of CTBT only appear to strengthen the **inequality in terms of nuclear arms possession between the haves and have-nots**.
- Though the best way to verify a comprehensive test ban would have been to permanently shut down all test sites, the idea was not acceptable to the nuclear weapon states.
- The treaty does not try to address the inequality by measures like disarmament. Despite well-intended proposals from some negotiating countries like India, the **CTBT could not anchor itself in a disarmament framework**.

Ineffective provisions:

- The idea of defining the “comprehensive test ban” as a “zero yield” test ban **only prohibited supercritical hydro-nuclear tests and not sub-critical hydrodynamic nuclear tests**. This served only U.S. interests and helped it secure unipolar supremacy.
- The CTBT prohibits all parties from carrying out any nuclear weapon test explosion or any other nuclear explosion **without clearly defining or elaborating the terms**.

Threat of a new nuclear arms race:

Changes in global politics and tensions:

- The U.S.’s unipolar moment seems to be ending with the **emergence of a multilateral order**.
- There would be a **strategic competition** among major powers. The U.S. now identifies Russia and China as challengers to its position.
- The U.S.’s tensions with China are already high with trade and technology disputes, militarisation in the South China Sea and most recently, with the novel coronavirus pandemic.
- The sanctions imposed on Russia by the U.S. and its allies, and its increasing isolation seem to be drawing Russia closer to China.
- The Cold War rivalry was already visible when the nuclear arms race began in the 1950s. **New rivalries in the global politics** may lead to a similar arms race in current times.

Arms race:

U.S.:

- The U.S.'s Nuclear Posture Review notes that the U.S. faces new nuclear threats because both Russia and China are increasing their reliance on nuclear weapons and calls for expanding the role of nuclear weapons and maintaining a more usable and diversified nuclear arsenal.
- The U.S. administration has embarked on a **30-year modernisation plan for its nuclear arsenal**. It's readiness at its nuclear test sites (Nevada test site) is being enhanced to permit resumption of testing at six months notice.

Russia and China:

- Russia and China have been concerned about the U.S.'s growing technological lead particularly in missile defence and conventional global precision-strike capabilities and have begun **expanding their defence capabilities**.
- **Russia has been developing hypersonic delivery systems** while China has been working on a modernisation programme to enhance the survivability of its arsenal.
- Both Russia and China are investing heavily in **offensive cyber capabilities**.

Ineffectiveness of treaties:

- The **Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty**, an arms control treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union, banning all of the land-based ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and missile launchers in the short medium and intermediate-range has ended with both countries opting out of it.
- **The New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START)** limits U.S. and Russian arsenals but will expire in 2021 and the U.S. President has already indicated that the U.S. does not plan to extend it.
- The U.S. administration has expressed its desire to bring China into nuclear arms control talks. However, China has denied any such possibility by pointing to the fact that the U.S. and Russia still account for over 90% of the global nuclear arsenals.

U.S. claims:

- A report issued by the United States State Department on "**Adherence to and Compliance with Arms Control, Non-proliferation, and Disarmament Agreements and Commitments (Compliance Report)**" has raised concerns that China might be conducting nuclear tests with low yields at its Lop Nur test site, in violation of its Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).
- The U.S. report also claims that Russia has conducted nuclear weapons experiments that produced a nuclear yield and were inconsistent with the 'zero yield' understanding underlying the CTBT.
- Russia and China have rejected the U.S.'s claims, but with growing rivalry among major powers, the report is a likely harbinger of a new nuclear arms race.
- **Resumption of nuclear testing may signal the end of CTBT, marking the beginnings of a new nuclear arms race.**

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Did SARS-CoV-2 begin from a lab?

Context:

- Origins of SARS-CoV-2.

Background:

- There have been many theories about the origins of the SARS-CoV-2.
- Some have suggested COVID-19 was the result of **biological warfare** gone wrong and may have originated in the Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) linked to China's covert biological weapons program.

Details:

Origin of the novel coronavirus:

- Recent scientific research by virologists throws some light on the origin of SARS-CoV-2.
- Based on the **study of the available genome sequence data** of the novel coronavirus, the study, "The proximal origin of SARS-CoV-2" notes that the virus sequence was **96% identical at the whole-genome level to a bat coronavirus** and rules out laboratory manipulation of a related SARS-CoV-like coronavirus.
- The study notes two possible origins of the virus:
 - **Natural selection** in an animal host before zoonotic transfer.
 - Natural selection in humans following zoonotic transfer.
- Despite indications of the origin being natural, **the source animal** still remains a mystery.

Concerns with China:

- Given the fact that WIV was involved in the study of bats and the viruses they carry and previous U.S. State Department cables (2018) have expressed serious **concerns over safety practices at the WIV**, the virus could have leaked from the lab in an accident.
- Chinese Government secrecy and putting in place new rules that require research on the origins to be vetted have raised more doubts.
- There is no evidence to prove or disprove a lab leak.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Assam's BTAD might see Governor's rule

- The elections scheduled to be held for the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) have been deferred indefinitely in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The **Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) administers the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) in Assam**, which falls under the **Sixth Schedule of the Constitution**.
 - The BTAD covers four districts of western and northern Assam.
- The inability to hold elections might lead to Governor's rule for the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts (BTAD) in Assam.
 - The **State Governor is the constitutional head of the BTAD**.

2. Australia cancels premier air exercise

- **Australia's multilateral air combat training exercise, Pitch Black 2020** has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 situation.
- In the last edition of Pitch Black in 2018, the Indian Air Force (IAF) had for the first time deployed fighter aircraft for the exercise.
- The multilateral air combat exercise provides a unique opportunity for exchange of knowledge and experience with forces across the globe in a dynamic warfare environment.
- The defence and strategic engagement with Australia has strengthened over time.
- On the bilateral front, naval cooperation has been at the forefront. The **bilateral naval exercise AUSINDEX in 2019** saw large scale participation of the Australian and Indian contingent.

G. Tidbits

1. Yemen separatists declare self-rule in south

- Yemen has been devastated by a **civil war between the Houthis and the government-backed coalition**.
 - The coalition consists of the **UAE-backed separatist Southern Transitional Council (STC)** and the **Saudi-backed government forces**.
- Yemen's main southern separatist group has recently announced that it would establish self-rule in areas under its control, including **Aden and southern governorates**.
- The deterioration of the ties between the allies of the coalition force could further worsen the situation in Yemen.

2. 'Executive is better suited to deal with the COVID-19 crisis'

- The Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde, in an interview, has opined that the **Executive**, with its control over men, material and money, is **better equipped than the judiciary and legislature to lead the battle against COVID-19**.
- The Chief Justice said the courts cannot dictate to the government how and when to deploy its resources in the present crisis and that the job of the courts in the present crisis is to **ensure that the rule of law is followed by the authorities** in their executive and administrative functions.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

1. The sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution contains provisions relating to the administration of tribal areas in the state of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram only.
2. The tribal areas listed under the sixth Schedule are constituted as Scheduled Areas.
3. Governors can direct the manner in which acts of the State Legislature and Parliament apply to the sixth Schedule areas.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option a

Explanation:

- The sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution contains provisions relating to the administration of tribal areas in the state of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.

States	Tribal Areas
1. Assam	1. The North Cachar Hills District. 2. The Karbi Anglong District. 3. The Bodoland Territorial Areas District.
2. Meghalaya	1. Khasi Hills District. 2. Jaintia Hills District. 3. The Garo Hills District.
3. Tripura	Tripura Tribal Areas District
4. Mizoram	1. The Chakma District. 2. The Mara District. 3. The Lai District.

- The tribal areas listed under the sixth Schedule are constituted as autonomous districts with each such autonomous district provided with a district council consisting of 30 members, partly elected and partly nominated.
- Governors can direct the manner in which acts of the state legislature apply to the sixth Schedule areas, while in respect of acts of the Parliament, such power rests with the President.

Q2. Which of the following pair/s is/are correctly matched?

- Exercise Pitch Black: Australia
- Exercise Red Flag: China
- Blue Flag Exercise: United States of America
- Samvedna Exercise: India

Options:

- 1, 2 and 4 only
- 1 and 4 only
- 3 and 4 only
- 1, 2, 3 and 4

Answer:

Option b**Explanation:**

- Exercise Pitch Black: Australia
- Exercise Red Flag: U.S. air force
- Blue Flag Exercise: Israeli air force
- Samvedna Exercise: Indian air force

The multilateral exercise named 'Samvedna' is the first composite HADR exercise in the South Asian Region and would involve representatives from the air forces of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and the UAE. It is being conducted under the Indian Air Force.

Q3. Arrange the following cities from east to west:

1. Aden
2. Muscat
3. Jeddah
4. Abu Dhabi
5. Tehran
6. Doha

Options:

- a. 2, 4, 6, 5, 1, 3
- b. 4, 2, 5, 6, 1, 3
- c. 2, 4, 6, 5, 3, 1
- d. 5, 2, 4, 6, 1, 3

Answer:**Option a****Explanation:**

The cities arranged from east to west- Muscat, Abu Dhabi, Doha, Tehran, Aden, Jeddah



Q4. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

1. Cotton is predominantly a Kharif crop in India.
2. Indigenous variety of cotton accounts for the largest share of cotton cultivation in India.
3. India is the largest producer and exporter of cotton in the world.
4. Cotton is part of the Minimum Support Price Mechanism procurement system.

Options:

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

Answer:

Option c

Explanation:

- The sowing season of cotton varies considerably from area to area and is generally early (April-May) in northern India and is delayed as one moves south (monsoon based in the southern zone).
- Cotton is a Kharif crop in the major parts of the country viz. Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and parts of Andhra Pradesh & Karnataka. In these areas, the irrigated crop is sown from March-May and the rain fed crop in June-July with the commencement of the monsoon.

- In Tamil Nadu, the major portion of the irrigated and rain fed crop is planted in September-October, whereas the sowing of the rain fed crop in the southern districts is extended up to November. Hence in Tamil Nadu, cotton is grown both as a Kharif and as a Rabi crop.
- Presently, about 90-95% cotton area in India is under Bt cotton, and India has emerged as the largest producer and second largest exporter of cotton in the world.
- Cotton is part of the Minimum Support Price Mechanism procurement system and is procured through the Cotton Corporation of India.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss the major aspects of India's Nuclear Doctrine and evaluate its suitability in the present context. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. Analyze India's stand with respect to the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). (10 marks, 150 words)
3. In the light of the changed global scenario, resumption of nuclear testing may signal the end of the ineffective and defective CTBT arrangement, marking the beginnings of a new nuclear arms race. Comment. (15 marks, 250 words)