

03 Jul 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. **India's trade deficit with China dips to \$48.66 billion**

Context:

India's trade deficit with China fell to \$48.66 billion in 2019-20 on account of the decline in imports from the neighbouring country.

Details:

- Exports to China in the last financial year stood at \$16.6 billion, while imports aggregated at \$65.26 billion.
- The trade deficit stood at \$53.56 billion in 2018-19 and \$63 billion in 2017-18.
- Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from China in India also dipped to \$163.78 million in 2019-20 from \$229 million in the previous fiscal.

Steps taken by India:

- India has time and again raised concerns over the widening trade deficit with China.
- The government is framing technical regulations and quality norms for several products to reduce dependence on Chinese imports.
- In April 2020, the government tightened norms for FDI coming from countries that share a land border with India.
 - As per the amended FDI policy, a company or an individual from a country that shares a land border with India can invest in any sector only after getting government approval.

2. India loses jurisdiction over Italian marines case

Context:

In a setback to India, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) at The Hague has decided that in a dispute between India and Italy, India is precluded from exercising its jurisdiction to try two Italian marines.

Background:

- The decision pertains to an incident of the year 2012 when two Italian marines fired shots while on-board an Italian vessel, Enrica Lexie killing two Indian fishermen aboard an Indian vessel, St. Anthony.
- The two marines were released from India and sent to Italy through orders passed by the Supreme Court.
- The dispute between the two countries as regards which country will try the two marines was before the PCA.

Details:

- The PCA has ruled that Italy would have jurisdiction to decide on the question of immunity for the marines. Thus, India is precluded from exercising its jurisdiction.
- The PCA also ruled that while India's conduct has not been in breach of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Italy breached provisions of the Convention by intercepting the navigation of India's vessel.
- Italy is, as a result, liable to pay compensation to India. And both the nations are required to hold consultations in order to arrive at the amount of compensation to be paid to India.

United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS):

UNCLOS, also known as the Law of the Sea Convention or the Law of the Sea Treaty, defines the rights and responsibilities of the nation towards the use of the world's oceans.

Read more about [UNCLOS](#).

3. No final decision on India's involvement in Colombo terminal: Rajapaksa

Context:

Controversy around the East Container Terminal (ECT) in Colombo.

Background:

- In 2019, Sri Lanka, Japan and India had signed an agreement to jointly develop the East Container Terminal at the Colombo Port.

This topic has been covered in the [29th May 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

- Current Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa has said there is no final agreement on the project, stating that it was an agreement between former President Maithripala Sirisena and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Issue:

- The statement indicates that the project at the strategic port, coveted by India for years and discussed bilaterally at the highest levels, is still far from certain.
- The controversy around the ECT is not new. The development of the terminal was a major flashpoint between former President Sirisena and former Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.
- Wickremesinghe took the position that developing the terminal would help Sri Lanka emerge a shipping hub in the region, while Mr. Sirisena resisted any foreign involvement in managing national assets.
- Development of the ECT has remained contentious in Sri Lanka, with nationalist groups objecting to any foreign involvement in running national assets.

Strategic importance and concerns:

- The ECT is adjacent to the Colombo International Container Terminal, which is a joint venture between China Merchants Port Holdings Company Limited and the Ports Authority, with the Chinese company holding an 85% stake.
- Over 70% of the transshipment business at the strategically located ECT comes from India.
- India and China's competing geopolitical interests in the island are well known, but India-backed projects have often seen more vocal protests.

4. China opposes U.K.'s citizenship offer

Context:

China warned Britain that it could retaliate with corresponding measures for London's decision to extend a broader path to citizenship for the residents of Hong Kong.

Details:

- The British plan covers almost three million Hong Kongers who either have a British National Overseas (BNO) passport or are eligible to apply for one.
- Britain's offer came in response to a sweeping new security law that China unveiled for the former British territory.

This topic has been covered in the [1st July 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

- The Chinese Embassy in London stressed that “all Chinese compatriots residing in Hong Kong are Chinese nationals”.
 - Hong Kong was under U.K. jurisdiction until it was handed over to China in 1997 with a guarantee that Beijing would preserve the city's judicial and legislative autonomy for 50 years.
- Britain had sought closer relations with China after ending its decades-long membership in the European Union this year.
- Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government also irritated the U.S in January 2020 by allowing private Chinese company Huawei to unroll Britain's speedy new data network. But Britain is now studying ways to cut Huawei out of its system entirely and build up an alliance of European and Asian providers that reduces China's dominance in the field.

5. With referendum win, Vladimir Putin tightens grip on power

Context:

The preliminary results released by the Election Commission in Russia showed that almost 78% of voters endorsed the amendments to its Constitution.

Details:

- The proposed changes had already been approved by Parliament and the Supreme Court. But the Kremlin chose to put it on vote for legitimacy and popular approval.
- The changes included:
 - A reorganisation of the government.
 - Introducing a higher minimum pension and wages.
 - A ban on gay marriage.
 - Restricting top officials from holding dual citizenship.
 - Enshrining “faith in God” as a core value.
 - Emphasising the primacy of the Constitution over international treaties and rulings.

Concerns:

- The most controversial change, however, was resetting President Putin's term limits. The Russian Constitution bars more than two consecutive presidential terms.
- Putin is now into the second term of his second stint as President, which will expire in 2024.
- The new Constitution doesn't change the two-term limit in theory, but in practice, it resets the clock on Mr. Putin's terms so that in the first election under the new Constitution, to be held in 2024, Mr. Putin can start afresh and remain in office for two more terms until 2036.
- The amendments have also enhanced the powers of the State Council, an advisory body until now, which Mr. Putin heads.
- If he stays in power for two more terms, he will be the longest-serving Russian leader since Peter the Great. The Tsar, who built the Russian Empire, was in power for 43 years until his death in 1725.
- Overall, the changes allow him to tighten his grip over Russia.

Challenges ahead:

- Russia is facing a fresh set of political, economic and foreign policy challenges.
- According to the [IMF](#), the economy hasn't expanded in dollar terms for a decade. It estimates the GDP to shrink by 6.6% this year.
- With the pandemic affecting local businesses and the oil price fall eating into export revenue, the Kremlin finds it difficult to fix the economy in the near term.
- In foreign policy, Russia's relationship with the West remains troublesome.
 - The sanctions imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 are still in place.
- While Russia managed to prevent the collapse of the Syrian regime after its intervention in the civil war, the [Syrian crisis](#) is far from resolved. Worse, Russia faces allegations of interference in the elections of other countries.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Private trains will benefit travellers: Rly Board chief

Context:

The Railways kick-started the process to allow private players to operate certain trains on its network by inviting Request for Qualifications (RFQ).

This topic has been covered in the [2nd July 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#). [Click here](#) to read.

Category: DEFENCE

1. MoD approves 33 new fighter jets in deals worth ₹38,900 cr.

Context:

Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) chaired by the Defence Minister has approved deals worth ₹38,900 crore.

Details:

- These include procurement of 21 MiG-29 fighter jets for the Indian Air Force (IAF), upgrade of 59 MiG-29s and acquisition of 12 Su-30 MKI aircraft.
 - MiG-29 procurement and upgrade from Russia is estimated to cost ₹7,418 crore.
 - Su-30 MKI will be procured from Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL).
- Other deals include Pinaka ammunition, armoured vehicle BMP armament upgrades and Software Defined Radio for the Army, Long Range Land Attack Missile Systems of over 1,000 km range and Astra Beyond Visual Range air-to-air missiles for the Navy and the IAF.
 - All of these would be procured domestically and are worth an estimated ₹31,130 crore.
- Another deal for 83 Light Combat Aircraft Mk-1A, estimated to cost ₹38,000 crore, is expected to be signed in the next two months.

Significance:

- Approvals come a week after the Defence Minister's visit to Moscow for the Victory Day Parade.
- It is an indication that India and Russia are cooperating more closely on strategic ties as a result of the tension with China along the LAC.
- Russia has assured India of all its requirements of defence supplies in the near future.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Bid to turn Shivalik forest into tiger reserve

Context:

The Saharanpur Divisional Commissioner has sent a proposal to the Uttar Pradesh Government to declare the Shivalik forest in the Saharanpur circle a tiger reserve.

Details:

- The forest constitutes the northern tip of the State, located at the foothills of the Shivalik range, connects four States — Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.
 - It is believed that it will facilitate safe movement of tigers and also reduce the man-animal conflict.
- As the Uttarakhand Government is proposing to relocate tigers from Corbett to Motichur range of the Rajaji National Park, it is believed that the Shivalik forests in Saharanpur would be suitable for their movement.

Note:

- If accepted, it would be the fourth tiger reserve in Uttar Pradesh.
- The three tiger reserves in Uttar Pradesh are Amangarh in Bijnor, Pilibhit and Dudhwa in Lakhimpur-Kheri.

D. GS 4 Related

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E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. In an uncertain world, a seat at the global high table

Context:

- India's membership of the [United Nations Security Council \(UNSC\)](#) as a non-permanent member.

Background:

Election for non-permanent membership:

- Initially, the contest for the non-permanent seats takes place in the respective regional groups and their sub-groups. Most times a consensus candidate emerges.
 - Unlike earlier, when India, Japan, Pakistan and some others used to get elected more frequently, many countries which have never served on the Council have begun to claim their turn.
- The candidate countries will have to next **secure a two-thirds majority of the member states in the General Assembly voting.**
 - Out of the 192 votes cast, India got 184. In the order of the number of votes received by each one, the countries elected were Mexico, India, Norway, Ireland and Kenya.

Details:

- India will be back in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as a non-permanent member for a two-year term beginning January 1, 2021. India is serving for the eighth time in the UNSC.
- India's membership of the UNSC comes at a critical time in the history of the UN. By 2021, it is likely that COVID-19 would have subsided and the contours of a new world order may have emerged.

India's priorities:

- In the COVID and the post-COVID world, India will work towards a new orientation for a reformed multilateral system.
- Counter-terrorism will be one of India's highest priorities as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council.
 - The 9/11 terrorist attack was expected to change the outlook towards terrorism but that never materialised because of vested interests and traditional positions. The UN did not succeed in either defining terrorism or in adopting the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

Significance for India:

- India will have a higher profile at the UN for the next two years as the non-permanent members have a collective veto over every resolution in the Council.
 - Permanent members can prevent the adoption of resolutions by themselves, but they need at least nine votes to get a resolution passed.
- India will also have a rare peep into the consultations chamber of the UNSC, which is closed to non-members of the Council.
- India's election as a non-permanent member has ignited the hope that its quest for permanent membership of the Council may succeed.

For more information on India's bid for permanent membership of UNSC, refer to:

[RSTV on UNSC and Permanent Seat for India](#)

Significance for UNSC:

- India has a record of contributing to some of the seminal resolutions of the UNSC.

- India's reputation for taking balanced positions and consensus building will be welcomed by the other members.

Challenges:

Strategic aspects:

- India will get involved in many issues in which it may not have any direct interest.
- Since India does not have a veto, it shall have to proceed cautiously not to offend anyone, lest they should go against it when a matter of vital interest for the country comes up in the Council.

Permanent membership:

- The debate on extending the permanent membership has thrown up many ideas, but till today, none of the proposals has the possibility of securing a two-thirds majority of the [General Assembly](#) and the votes of the five permanent members.
- The permanent members are being adamant about protecting their privileged positions and also a majority of the UN members are against the privileges of the permanent members, particularly the veto being extended to new members. The opposition to the expansion is not India-specific.

For more information on this topic, refer to:

[CNA dated June 6, 2020](#)

Category: HEALTH

1. Staying alert

Context:

- Functioning of the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme.

Background:

Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme:

- The Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) functions as **India's disease monitoring network**.
- It is responsible for alerting the Centre and the world about the emergence of disease outbreaks, a surge in novel pathogens, the rate of spread and remedial action taken.

Details:

- On average, there are 30-40 alerts every week from the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme. However, the advent of COVID-19 has resulted in **decreased alerts from the IDSP**.
 - Once COVID-19 was declared a pandemic and a **lockdown imposed**, movements came to a standstill, with hospitals shut, and only testing and treatment for COVID-19 available at government healthcare facilities, the **reporting of other diseases suffered**.

- The other explanation is that akin to a decline in deaths from accidents, the **lockdown has contributed to a decline in transmission of contagious diseases**. Many of the outbreaks that are routinely reported involve pathogens that are airborne and spread through social interaction.

Concerns:

- The lack of public updates from IDSP in recent times seems unacceptable. This might lead to a **lack of surveillance** and might result in an outbreak of diseases in India.
 - The pandemic has taught the world that no modelling can quite forecast the spread of disease and infection may turn uncontrollable in a short duration.
- The IDSP also faces a **manpower crunch**.

Conclusion:

- It is essential **to improve the overall routine surveillance as well as provide timely updates** to the public and international health agencies.
- The pandemic needs serious focus, but India cannot afford to ignore other diseases.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Core's contraction

Context:

- The Commerce Ministry's provisional figures for the [core sector](#) for May 2020.

Details:

- The Commerce Ministry's provisional figures show that the output in the **eight core industries** has had an overall contraction for a third straight month in May. Seven core sectors have witnessed declines in production compared with a year earlier, with six sectors witnessing double-digit drops.
 - Steel and cement were the worst hit, as construction activity and infrastructure projects remained mostly stalled.
 - Refinery products, with the largest weight in the index contributing 28%, contracted as the curbs on vehicular movement stymied demand for automobile fuels.
 - Crude oil and natural gas continued their slide adding to the problems dogging India's hydrocarbon exploration and production industry.
 - Coal production also fell as the lack of demand for electricity from the nation's factories depressed power production as well as the need for the key thermal plant fuel.
 - The output of electricity though contracted, it improved its performance from April aided by the partial easing of restrictions and peak summer consumption by households.
 - The **fertilizer industry has registered a production rise of 7.5%** reversing the slump seen in the preceding two months and signalling robust activity in the agricultural sector at the start of the Kharif season.

Agricultural sector:

- A promising and early start to this year's monsoon bodes well for the **crucial farm income-dependent rural economy**.

- With the pandemic and the lockdown having sent lakhs of people back to their rural homes from jobs in the cities, a strong uptick in economic activity across the hinterland is significant.
- The **above-average quantity and improved spatial distribution of rainfall in June have spurred a sharp jump in Kharif sowing**, with the area sown more than doubling compared with a year earlier.

Challenges:

- As in other years, a lot will depend upon the monsoon staying its course.
- Also, there is a danger to the farm sector, especially in **western, central and northern India** this year from **locust swarms**.
 - The [Food and Agriculture Organization](#) had in its recent update warned that India would need to remain on high alert through July for the possible arrival of **swarms from northern Africa**.

F. Prelims Facts

1. India's torture culture needs to end now

- Recognizing police torture as endemic and a systemic problem, there is a need for a stringent legal framework that is aligned with and committed to the principles of international law under the **UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT)** to which India has been a signatory since 1997. **Although India signed the UNCAT in 1997, it is yet to ratify it.**
- The UNCAT aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the world.
- The Supreme Court, through its verdict in the Francis Coralie Mullin v. Union Territory of Delhi (1981) and Sheela Barse v. State of Maharashtra (1987), has condemned cruelty and torture as violative of [Article 21](#) of the Indian constitution.

For a detailed analysis of this topic, refer to:

[CNA dated July 2, 2020](#)

G. Tidbits

1. FDI will be regulated in Internet tech sector: MEA

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has reiterated that India remains open for Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) but will enforce regulatory systems while welcoming the inflow of funds into Internet technologies.
- The response came two days after India banned 59 Chinese apps.
- The move is seen as an apparent retaliation against Beijing's economic interests as tension continued along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

Read more about the issue covered in [30th June 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following initiatives is/are established under the United Nations

Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)?

1. International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS)
2. International Seabed Authority
3. Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS)

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

1. **International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS):** Established by the UNCLOS, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea is an independent judicial body that adjudicates disputes arising out of the convention.
2. **International Seabed Authority:** It was formed in 1994 under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982) for regulating the exploration and exploitation of marine non-living resources of oceans in international waters.
3. **Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS):** Established under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, CLCS is responsible for facilitating the implementation of UNCLOS with respect to the establishment of the outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to UN Convention Against Torture (UNCAT):

1. It aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the world.
2. India has signed and ratified the convention.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (commonly known as the United Nations Convention against Torture (UNCAT)) is an international human rights treaty, under the review of the United Nations, that aims to prevent torture and other acts of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment around the world.
- India signed the convention in 1997 but it remains among a handful of countries including Pakistan and China which are yet to ratify the convention.

Q3. Which of the following Tiger Reserves are located in Uttar Pradesh?

1. Amangarh Tiger Reserve
2. Pilibhit Tiger Reserve
3. Rajaji Tiger Reserve
4. Dudhwa Tiger Reserve
5. Dampa Tiger Reserve

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- There are three tiger reserves in Uttar Pradesh. They are Amangarh in Bijnor, Pilibhit and Dudhwa in Lakhimpur-Kheri.

Q4. Consider the following statements about the Integrated Disease Surveillance Program (IDSP) :

1. It was launched with the assistance of the World Health Organisation.
2. It is a unit under the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Integrated Disease Surveillance Program (IDSP) is an initiative by the Ministry of Health and Family Affairs started in 2004 with the assistance of the World Bank.
- It is a unit under the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC).

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. India's upcoming membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) as a non-permanent member would be significant for both India and the UNSC. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)
2. Discuss the major causes for the launch of the Non-Cooperation movement in 1920 and analyze its impacts on the national movement. (15 marks, 250 words)

