

# 13 Aug 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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## B. GS 2 Related

### Category: HEALTH

#### 1. Study finds poor access to abortion drugs

##### Context:

Findings of the study carried out by the Foundation for Reproductive Health Services India (FRHSI) indicated a severe shortage of medical abortion (MA) drugs in five out of the six states surveyed.

##### Medical Abortion Drugs

- Abortion pills are different from emergency contraceptive pills.
- Abortion pills or MA drugs are abortifacients which terminate a pregnancy by expelling an embryo or foetus.
- Abortion pills are approved for use only up to nine weeks, whereas an ultrasound can detect a foetus only at around 13-14 weeks.

##### Findings:

##### *Shortage of abortion pills:*

- The study found an overwhelming shortage of abortion pills or medical abortion drugs.
  - The study conducted among 1,500 chemists in six States found abysmal stocking in Madhya Pradesh (6.5%), Punjab (1%), Tamil Nadu (2%), Haryana (2%) and Delhi (34%).
  - The only State that seemed to be better was Assam (69.6%).

##### *Reasons for shortage:*

- Over-regulation of drugs to curb gender-biased sex selection such as through government programmes like 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' has hindered access to safe, legal and cost-effective abortion.
- Medical abortion drugs are over-regulated as compared to other prescription drugs.
  - Regulatory hurdles are due to a misunderstanding that easy availability of medical abortion drugs will be misused for sex selection.
- State-wise regulatory and legal barriers are the key reasons why 79% of the chemists surveyed refrained from stocking these drugs.

##### Concerns:

- The regulatory crackdown has resulted in abortion services becoming inaccessible, especially those during the second trimester.
- The shortage forces many women to seek a surgical abortion from a facility, reducing her choice.
  - It will also reduce access to safe abortion and force them to seek services from unsafe providers.
  - There are only 16,296 approved abortion facilities in the private sector in the country.
  - Whereas, MA drugs can be provided by an obstetrician or a gynaecologist, who are estimated to number about 60,000-70,000.
- The cost of first trimester surgical abortion is much higher than the cost of abortion pills plus the consultation fee.

**Conclusion:**

- The law on abortions allows termination of pregnancy in the first nine weeks and in some cases even in the second trimester, such as in sexual assault cases as well as due to foetal anomalies. Therefore, these abortions are allowed under the Medical Termination Act.
- There is little ground for restricting MA drugs.
- Also, MA drugs are also cost-effective.

**Note:**

During COVID-19, the lack of access to abortion services is likely to have worsened because:

- Travelling to a surgical facility is challenging
- Cost of the procedure may have gone up as clinics charge for PPE (personal protection equipment)
- It would require a mandatory COVID-19 test.

## C. GS 3 Related

### Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

#### 1. 'Keep Arunachal out of any Naga peace deal'

**Context:**

An apex students' body All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU) has demanded that Arunachal Pradesh be kept out of the purview of the push for a solution to the Naga political problem.

**Details:**

- In a statement, the body has said that there are no Nagas in Arunachal Pradesh. All the tribes inhabiting the State are Arunachalees and Indians.
- It asserted that while the body would welcome the initiative for resolving the Naga issue, it would strongly oppose any attempts made to change the territorial jurisdiction of the State or any kind of administrative, political or other interventions.

**Background:**

- The demand comes in the backdrop of centre's decision to conclude the talks with various Naga groups by September 2020.
  - The largest of the Naga groups is the National Socialist Council of Nagalim or Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN.
  - Seven other stakeholders, including factions of the rival NSCN (Khaplang), form the Naga National Political Groups.

### **NSCN (IM)'s vision of Nagalim:**

- Nagalim or Greater Nagaland is a long-term goal of the NSCN (IM).
- It encompasses Naga-inhabited areas of Myanmar and the north-eastern States bordering Nagaland.
- The Nagalim map the outfit released a few years ago includes Tirap, Changlang, Longding, Anjaw, Lohit and Namsai districts of Arunachal Pradesh.
  - The central government had earlier rejected the NSCN-IM's demand for unification of Naga inhabited areas located in Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam.

### **Note:**

- NSCN (IM), peeved with interlocutor R.N. Ravi and has demanded that he be removed from the position.
- However, traditional tribal groups in Nagaland and some extremist groups are not on the same page as NSCN (IM).
  - Naga Hoho, the apex body of 14 tribes and the Lotha (tribe) Hoho believes that replacing Mr. Ravi would delay the peace process and lead to endless negotiation while remaining in one's comfort zone at the cost of peace and tranquility.

**Read more about issues related to Naga Peace talks covered in 12<sup>th</sup> August 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis.**

## **Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**

### **1. IISER Bhopal scientists' study on seed germination may lead to crop improvement**

#### **Context:**

A team of researchers at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Bhopal, has conducted a study on seed germination that could have a major impact on agriculture in the long run by helping determine the optimum timing of seed germination and thus ensure high plant yields.

#### **Details:**

- The study focused on the interplay between:
  - Plant hormones like Absciscic acid (ABA) which inhibit the sprouting of the seed,
  - Environmental cues like light which promotes the sprouting process and
  - Darkness

- The mechanisms underlying germination inhibition by ABA protein have been the subject of intensive research.
- There is scant knowledge about the mechanisms controlled by ABA for arresting the post-germination growth in response to environmental cues.

## Abscisic acid (ABA)

- Abscisic acid is a plant hormone. It modulates plant growth and development.
- ABA functions in many plant developmental processes, including seed and bud dormancy, the control of organ size and stomatal closure.
- It acts as a master regulator of the seed's growth by controlling several aspects of plant development, including seed dormancy and germination, as well as controlling growth under adverse conditions such as drought or salinity.
- ABA signals the seed not to germinate until there are favourable conditions for growth.
- If the stress comes after the germination of a seed, ABA suppresses further growth of the seedling. This inhibition leads the seedling to invest its energies less in its growth and more in defence mechanisms designed to ensure its survival.

### **Significance:**

- The research has proved that the inhibition of seedling growth by ABA is much stronger in darkness as compared to light conditions.
- Understanding the complex factors that modulate ABA sensitivity is vital to developing economically important plant varieties that have better tolerance to stress conditions.
- The results of the study are vital as they come at a time when frustrated farmers across Maharashtra have lodged thousands of complaints against seed companies, alleging them of having provided them with seeds that failed to germinate.

## 2. 'Mega labs' to boost COVID-19 testing

### **Context:**

The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) is working on developing mega labs to ramp up testing for COVID-19 as well as improve the accuracy rate.

- The labs will be repurposing large machines, called Next Generation Sequencing machines (NGS).

## Next Generation Sequencing

- NGS – massively parallel or deep sequencing are related terms that describe a DNA sequencing technology which has revolutionised genomic research.
- NGS are normally used for sequencing human genomes.
- Using NGS an entire human genome can be sequenced within a single day.

### **Benefits:**

- The mega labs will sequence 1,500 to 3,000 viral genomes at a go to detect the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- Used optimally and with appropriate modifications, these machines can substantially detect the presence of the virus even in several instances where the traditional RT-PCR (reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction) tests fail.
  - The genome method can read a bigger chunk of virus genome and provide more certainty that the virus in question is indeed the particular coronavirus of interest.
- It can also trace the evolutionary history of the virus and track mutations more reliably.
- While RT-PCR needs primers and probes (a key hurdle in operationalizing such tests on a mass scale early on in the pandemic), the NGS only needs custom reagents.

## Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

### 1. Forest loss threatens hornbills

#### Context:

A study based on satellite data has flagged a high rate of deforestation in a major hornbill habitat in Arunachal Pradesh.

#### Concerns:

- Using fine-scale satellite imagery, changes in forest cover of Papum Reserve Forest (RF) adjoining the Pakke Tiger Reserve as well as a part of Assam affected by illegal felling and ethnic conflict was assessed.
- Papum RF is a nesting habitat of three species of the large, colourful fruit-eating hornbills:
  - Great Hornbill
  - Wreathed Hornbill
  - Oriental Pied Hornbill
- Results show the loss and degradation of critical hornbill habitat in the biologically rich forests of the Indian Eastern Himalaya.
  - The data pointed to alarming deforestation rates in Papum RF with the forest cover having declined to 76% of the total RF area.
- The ecologists assessed the habitat loss due to illegal logging. Illegal logging, has led to fewer tall trees where the birds nest.
- Also, forests are often under pressure due to agricultural expansion, conversion to plantations .
- According to the Global Forest Watch 2020 report, the State lost 1,110 sq.km. of primary forest from 2002-2019.

#### Note:

- Hornbills used to be hunted for their casques – upper beak and feathers for headgear despite being cultural symbols of some ethnic communities in the northeast, specifically the Nyishi of Arunachal Pradesh.

- A 20-year-old conservation programme entailing the use of fibre-glass beaks reduced the threat to the birds to a large extent.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. A self-reliant foreign policy

##### Context:

- Foreign policy of India.

##### Background:

- ‘Athma nirbhartha’ or **Self-reliance in the domain of foreign policy** would mean the ideal of **strategic autonomy**.
  - Strategic autonomy denotes the ability of a state to pursue its national interests and adopt its preferred foreign policy without being constrained in any manner by other states.
- India has historically emphasized on maintaining strategic autonomy. The **policy of Non-alignment** has served as the major pillar of India’s quest for strategic autonomy.
  - The Non-Aligned Movement was formed during the Cold War, as an organization of States that did not seek to formally align themselves with either the United States or the Soviet Union, but sought to remain independent or neutral.
- Despite the **changing power equations in the global affairs**, India’s quest for autonomy in making foreign policy choices has remained constant.
  - From 1947 to 1991, the world order was mostly bipolar with the erstwhile Soviet Union and The U.S. forming the two power blocs. With the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, the world order remained mostly unipolar with the U.S. being the sole superpower. However, off late with China having caught up with the U.S. both economically and militarily and with the advent of middle powers like India the current scenario remains mostly **multipolar**.

##### Details:

- The article argues for the recalibration of the idea of ‘strategic autonomy’ in foreign relations policy.

##### **Historical examples of flexibility in policy:**

- Despite the overwhelming emphasis on strategic autonomy throughout its history, during moments of crisis, **India has reinterpreted Strategic freedom and shown flexibility for survival**.
- Compelling geopolitical circumstances led India to enter into **de facto alliance-like cooperation with major powers**.

- During the **1962 war with China**, India did appeal to the U.S. for emergency military aid.
- In the build-up to the 1971 war with Pakistan, **India entered a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union** to ward-off the threat posed by China and the U.S.
- During the 1999 Kargil war, India was welcoming of a direct intervention by the U.S. to force Pakistan to back down.
- In the above cases, India's decision to seek co-operation with major powers did not in any way mean that India became any less autonomous, rather this flexibility allowed India to secure its freedom, sovereignty and territorial integrity. India adopted the tactic of **realpolitik**.
  - Realpolitik signifies a system of politics or principles based on practical rather than moral or ideological considerations.

### **Policy for the current situation:**

- The current situation with tense **India-China relations** might mark another inflection point with regard to strategic autonomy.
- With China and the U.S. sliding into a new Cold War like situation and with China challenging India's security and sovereignty, the article argues that **India's adherence to the Non-alignment policy makes little sense**.
- The article argues the case for India's **alignment with the U.S. to meet the Chinese threat**.
- The article states that the fears that proximity to the U.S. will lead to loss of India's strategic autonomy are unfounded given that India has never been subordinated to a superpower despite India aligning with such powers in the past.

### **Way forward for India:**

#### **Using the American support:**

- Given the increasing assertiveness of China vis-a-vis India and with the U.S. confronting China frontally, India should aim to make **use of American support to counterbalance China** where ever possible.

#### **Remaining non-aligned:**

- Even while aligning with the U.S, India should make all **efforts to stay as an independent power**.
- India should not remain overly reliant on the U.S. as this could constrict India's options in some domains serving national interest such as India's ties with Iran and Russia and efforts to speed up indigenous defence modernisation.
- The **focus of India's alignment with the U.S. should be on constraining China**.

#### **Diversifying relations:**

- The article argues against isolation or alliance with one great power and argues for **diversification of relations with like-minded countries to achieve common goals**.
- Diversification of relations should become the essence of self-reliance for India in foreign relations. India should continue to retain good ties with a range of strategic partners, including the U.S.



- India could focus on intensifying **cooperation with middle powers in Asia and around the world.**

For more information on the issue of re-defining the policy of non-alignment, refer to: [CNA 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020](#).

## Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

### 1. How the tiger can regain its stripes

#### Context:

- [Tiger Conservation](#) efforts in India.

#### Background:

- The most recent estimation of tiger population in India has noted that there has been an **increase in tigers** from about 2,000 in 1970 to around 3,000 presently.

For more information on this topic refer to: [CNA 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020](#)

#### Details:

- Despite the increase in the tiger population in India, the author of the article, **K Ullas Karanth, a leading tiger expert in India**, points out serious concerns regarding tiger conservation efforts in India.

#### *Low growth rate of tiger population:*

- Despite, the fact that Tiger population has increased in India and despite India having done better than other tiger range countries, **the annual growth rate remains very low.**

#### *Potential much higher:*

- Given the expansive land base of India, it has the **potential to hold 10,000 to 15,000 wild tigers**. However there seems to be no goal or plan to realize this potential.

#### *Regional disparity:*

- The tiger population recovery has not been even throughout the country and has only been sporadic in a few reserves.

#### *Cost-effect analysis:*

- The governments have been **investing heavily, but not very intelligently**, in tiger conservation. Excessive funding of a few reserves while neglecting large areas with greater recovery potential have become a concern.
- There seems to be the **emphasis on the massively funded eco-development activities** in tiger reserves. This calls into question the efficiency of the investments.
- The article laments that the unnecessary and massive borrowings from the **Global Environment Facility-World Bank** combine to create new models for tiger recovery.

### ***Government monopoly:***

- A major concern of the current conservation policy is the **government monopoly over tiger management** which has led to the lack of data transparency and rigorous, independent tiger monitoring.

### **Policy mistakes:**

- The implementation of the **Forest Rights Act of 2006** has opened up the wildlife habitats for cultivation and exploitation by loosely defined “forest-dwellers”. The subsequent impact on tiger habitats has been severe.
- The Tiger Task Force (TTF) was appointed in 2005, to review the status of the tigers in India. The author argues that the task force driven by its urge to maintain politically correct ideologies and based on inappropriate interpretation of the available scientific studies resulted in a report by the TTF that created a **tiger management model that only enlarged the influence of the forest bureaucracy** and did nothing to help tiger conservation efforts.
- Institutions like the **National Tiger Conservation Authority have increased in size**, taking under it schemes totally unrelated to tigers, such as the recovery of snow leopards and translocation of African cheetahs to India. This would have a detrimental impact on the effectiveness of the organization.
  - The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) was established in 2005 following a recommendation of the Tiger Task Force.
  - The **NTCA would be responsible for implementation of the Project Tiger plan to protect endangered tigers**. The NTCA would lay down normative standards, guidelines for tiger conservation in the Tiger Reserves, apart from National Parks and Sanctuaries. The NTCA would also facilitate and support tiger reserve management in the States through eco-development and people’s participation.

### **Way forward:**

#### **Reducing bureaucratic overload:**

- The author calls for winding down bureaucracy’s role in conservation efforts and argues for restricting the forest bureaucracy’s role to enforcement of wildlife law.
- The author argues that **merging Project Tiger with other Central schemes for wildlife conservation** could be a good start in this direction.

#### **Involving all stakeholders:**

- Government monopoly over domains of tiger conservation such as tiger research, monitoring, nature education, tourism and conflict mitigation should be done away with and the **private enterprises, local communities, NGOs and scientific institutions should be involved in tiger conservation efforts**.

#### **Sustainable development:**

- There is the need to **recognize the existing challenges in tiger conservation** and address them in future policies.

- The slow growth of the economy has resulted in widespread poverty. This has resulted in excessive reliance on forest exploitation for livelihoods and protein dependency on wild meat that is driving wildlife hunting.
- There is the need to adopt a more sustainable model of development **balancing the need to conserve the environment while also addressing the need for human development.**

## F. Tidbits

### 1. U.K. economy shrinks by record 20%, in recession

#### What's in News?

Britain's economy shrank by a record 20.4% in the second quarter when the COVID-19 lockdown was tightest.

- It is the most severe contraction reported by any major economy so far, with a wave of job losses set to hit later in 2020.
- The data confirmed that the world's sixth-biggest economy had entered a recession.
- The Bank of England forecast that it would take until the final quarter of 2021 for the economy to regain its previous size, and warned unemployment was likely to rise sharply.

### 2. Stop the dismantling of environmental rules

#### **Environmental Performance Index:**

- The global Environmental Performance Index report has consistently put India at the bottom of its rankings.
  - India ranked 168th in the 12th edition of the Environment Performance Index (EPI) 2020. It was ranked 177<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in 2018.
- EPI is a **biennial index prepared by Yale University and Columbia University in collaboration with the World Economic Forum.**
- The index considers **32 indicators of environmental performance** and includes 10-year trends in environmental performance at the national and global levels. The major indicators include: **environmental health policy, biodiversity and habitat, air and water pollution and climate change.**

#### **Deaths due to air pollution:**

- According to a study in the British journal, The Lancet, 12.4 lakh deaths i.e. **5% of all deaths in India in 2017, could be attributed to air pollution.**

## G. Prelims Facts

### 1. More than a vaccine, it is about vaccination

- Gavi is an international organisation created in 2000 to **improve access to new and underused vaccines for children living in the world's poorest countries.**
- It is a **public-private global health partnership.**
  - GAVI brings together developing country and donor governments, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Bank, the vaccine industry in both industrialised and developing countries, research and technical agencies, civil society, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and other private philanthropists.

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. "Great Hornbill" is the state bird of:

1. Arunachal Pradesh
2. Assam
3. Kerala
4. Karnataka
5. Nagaland

**Choose the correct option:**

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

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

"Great Hornbill" is the state bird of both Kerala and Arunachal Pradesh.

Q.2 Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to Absciscic acid?

1. It is a plant hormone that modulates plant growth and development.
2. It is instrumental in increasing the tolerance of plants to different kinds of stress.
3. It is a plant growth promoter.

**Choose the correct option:**

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

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- Abscisic acid is a plant hormone that modulates plant growth and development.
- The plant growth regulator is instrumental in increasing the tolerance of plants to different kinds of stress.
- Plant growth hormones or regulators are of the following types:
  - Plant Growth Promoters
  - Plant Growth Inhibitors
- Abscisic acid is one of the plant growth inhibitors.

**Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Pakke Tiger Reserve:**

1. It is located in the foothills of the eastern Himalaya in Arunachal Pradesh.
2. It shares a boundary with Nameri National Park in Assam.
3. Papum Reserve Forest lies to the east of Pakke Tiger Reserve.
4. Four Hornbill species are found in the tiger reserve.

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

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

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

- Pakke Tiger Reserve is located in the in the foothills of the eastern Himalaya in Arunachal Pradesh.
- It shares a boundary with Nameri National Park in Assam.
- Papum Reserve Forest lies to the east of Pakke Tiger Reserve.
- Pakke is a haven for hornbills in North-east India, with four of the nine species – the Great Hornbill, the Wreathed Hornbill, the Oriental Pied Hornbill and the Rufous-necked Hornbill- found here. This makes the area extremely important for hornbills, especially considering that hunting and habitat loss threatens hornbill species in the rest of Northeast India.

**Q.4 Consider the following statements with respect to land boundaries of Nagaland:**

1. Arunachal Pradesh – North
2. Assam – South
3. Manipur – West

**Choose the correct option:**

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

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

Nagaland is a landlocked state in north-eastern India. It is bordered by the state of Arunachal Pradesh to the north, Assam to the west, Manipur to the south and Myanmar to the east.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of the current geo-political situation, India will need to recalibrate its idea of 'strategic autonomy' in foreign relations policy. Comment. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS Paper 2/International relations)
2. Despite the increase in the tiger population in India, there continues to be concerns regarding tiger conservation efforts in India. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 3/ Environment and Ecology)