

17 Oct 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Putin wants New START treaty extended

Context:

President of Russia, Vladimir Putin proposed a one-year extension without conditions to the New START Treaty.

New START Treaty

- New START is a nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation with the formal name of Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms.
- It is the last major nuclear arms reduction accord between Russia and the U.S.
- The New START deal was signed in April 2010 but went into force in February 2011.
- It lasts for ten years but with a possible extension.
- New START replaced the Treaty of Moscow (SORT), which was due to expire in December 2012. Its name is a follow-up to the START I treaty, which expired in December 2009.

2. Knesset backs Israel-UAE deal

Context:

Israel's Parliament - Knesset voted in favour of normalisation of ties with the United Arab Emirates. A total of 80 lawmakers voted to approve the U.S.-brokered agreement.

Details:

- The UAE in August became the first Arab state to establish relations with Israel since Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.
- It was quickly followed by Bahrain.
- The U.S.-brokered deals were formalised at the White House.
- The agreements were condemned by the Palestinians as a betrayal.

Read more about the topic covered in [14th August 2020](#) and [22nd September 2020](#) Comprehensive News Analysis.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Any stay on proceedings is valid only for 6 months: SC

Context:

In an order, the Supreme Court has held that any stay on civil or criminal proceedings is valid for a period of six months, beyond which the trial will resume.

Details:

- A stay that has been granted by any court, including the High Court, automatically expires within a period of six months.
- It was made clear that an extension of the stay has to be granted only for a "good reason", adding that, in such a case, it must be shown that the case was of such exceptional nature that continuing the stay was more important than having the trial finalised.

2. India fares poorly in hunger index

Context:

Global Hunger Index 2020 has been published.

Global Hunger Index

- The Index is a peer-reviewed report released annually by Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe.
- It uses four parameters to determine its scores namely, undernourishment, child stunting, child wasting, and child mortality.
- GHI score is classified by severity – low, moderate and serious.

Key Findings - India:

- India has the highest prevalence of wasted children under five years in the world, which reflects acute undernutrition.
- By severity, it falls in the “serious” category.
- The prevalence of child wasting was 17.3% in 2015-19 period, in comparison to 15.1% in 2010-14.
- India ranks 94 out of 107 countries in the Index, lower than neighbours such as Bangladesh (75) and Pakistan (88).
- In the region of south, east and south-eastern Asia, the only countries which fare worse than India are Timor-Leste, Afghanistan and North Korea.
- India fares worst in child wasting (low weight for height, reflecting acute undernutrition) and child stunting (low height for age, reflecting chronic undernutrition), which together make up a third of the total score.
 - Child stunting has actually improved significantly, from 54% in 2000 to less than 35% in 2020.
 - Child wasting has not improved in the last two decades and is worse than it was a decade ago.
- India has improved in child mortality rates now at 3.7%).
- It has also shown improvement in terms of undernourishment, with about 14% of the total population getting an insufficient caloric intake.

Read more about “The road to zero hunger by 2030” covered in the [16th October 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. New research sheds light on declining star formation in Milky Way

Context:

A team of astronomers from the Pune-based National Centre for Radio Astrophysics (NCRA-TIFR) and Raman Research Institute (RRI) in Bengaluru have used the upgraded **Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT)** to measure the **atomic hydrogen content of galaxies** seen as they were **eight billion years ago** when the universe was young.

Details:

- Galaxies are mostly made up of gas and stars.
- The gas gets converted into stars during the life of a galaxy.
- How the amounts of both gas and stars change with time must be determined in order to understand the galaxies.
- It has been discovered that galaxies formed stars at a higher rate when the universe was young than they do today.
- The star formation activity in galaxies peaked about 8-10 billion years ago and has been declining steadily till today.
- However, the cause of this decline was unknown as there had been no information regarding the amount of atomic hydrogen gas (the primary fuel for star formation) in galaxies in these early times.
- The measurement of the atomic hydrogen mass of distant galaxies was done by using the upgraded GMRT to search for a spectral line in atomic hydrogen.
- Unlike stars which emit light strongly at optical wavelengths, the atomic hydrogen signal lies in the radio wavelengths, at a wavelength of 21 cm, and can only be detected with radio telescopes.
 - The team used a technique called “stacking” to combine the 21 cm signals of nearly 8,000 galaxies that had earlier been identified with the help of optical telescopes.
 - This method measures the average gas content of these galaxies.

Significance:

- For the first time, atomic hydrogen gas content of star-forming galaxies about 8 billion years ago has been measured.
 - Given the intense star formation in these early galaxies, their atomic gas would be consumed by star formation in just one or two billion years.
 - And, if the galaxies could not acquire more gas, their star formation activity would decline, and finally, cease.
- The discovery may help understand the mystery behind declining star formation activity in the Milky Way.

Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT)

- GMRT is an array of thirty fully steerable parabolic radio telescopes of 45-metre diameter. It is operated by the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research.
- It was designed and built by a team led by the late pioneering astrophysicist Govind Swarup in the 1980s and 1990s.
- Detecting the 21 cm signal from the most distant galaxies in the universe was the main science goal of the GMRT.
- Its design is based on the 'SMART' concept - for Stretch Mesh Attached to Rope Trusses.
- It is erected at Narayangaon, near Pune.
- The location for GMRT, Pune meets several important criteria such as low man-made radio noise, availability of good communication, vicinity of industrial, educational and other infrastructure and, a geographical latitude sufficiently north of the geomagnetic equator in order to have a reasonably quiet ionosphere and yet be able to observe a good part of the southern sky as well.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Stubble burning: Justice Lokur, students to save NCR

Context:

A Supreme Court Bench led by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sharad A. Bobde has appointed Justice Lokur as a one-man committee to monitor and prevent instances of stubble burning by farmers in the three states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

- Justice Lokur was monitoring stubble burning for two years before his retirement.

Mandate of the committee:

- Former Supreme Court judge Madan B. Lokur will be assisted by student volunteer forces deployed from the National Cadet Corps, the National Service Scheme and the Bharat Scouts and Guides, to protect Delhi-NCR from pollution caused by stubble burning in the neighbouring states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.
- Student forces will patrol highways and fields in the three states and ensure that no fires are started in the fields.
- Existing mobile teams and nodal officers of the states will report to the committee.
- The Supreme Court's own Environment Pollution Prevention and Control Authority (EPCA) would consult with the committee on issues related to stubble burning.
- The committee will file status reports with the Court at least every fortnight.

Category: ECONOMY

1. MSP is key to India's food security, says PM

Context:

The Prime Minister of India has reiterated his support for minimum support prices and government procurement of crops.

Details:

- PM was speaking at a virtual event to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the [Food and Agriculture Organisation](#).
- "MSP and government procurement are an important part of the country's food security. Therefore, it is important that it should continue to function with better facilities and scientific management. We are committed to this," he said.
- PM's assurance comes amidst protests against the recently introduced Agri-reforms.
- Protesters opine that the three recent laws passed by Parliament would weaken the APMC system and ultimately lead to the phasing out of government procurement at MSP rates while encouraging corporate buyers who will purchase the produce at lower rates.
- However, the government asserts that the reforms would increase farmers' incomes.

Read more about [Minimum Support Price](#).

Read about the Agricultural Reforms covered in [27th September 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. China's rise and fall at the UN

The editorial analyses various reasons as to why the time is opportune for India to push for institutional changes and reformed multilateralism in the global system.

Context:

The [United Nations](#) turned 75 in 2020.

China's fall at the UN:

- India defeated China in the elections for a seat on the UN's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). This was the first such victory in a decade.
- China's candidate had lost to a Singaporean in the race for DG World Intellectual Property Organization.
- Subsequently, China also lost against Samoa for a seat on the UN Statistical Commission.
- Also, it just about managed to get elected to the UN High Rights Council, coming fourth out of five contestants for four vacancies.
- Negative reaction to China's threat of a veto to forestall a discussion on the pandemic in the UNSC, point to disenchantment with China in the globe.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has posed hurdles to China in its march to global hegemony.

China's strengths:

- Taking advantage of its position as a member of the P-5 and as a huge aid giver, China captured the top positions at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the [UN Industrial Development Organization \(UNIDO\)](#), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

China's Rise at the UN:

- China saw an opportunity in World War I to rid itself of German occupation from some of its territory and allied with the United Kingdom and France.
- The Chinese sent large numbers of labour to support the western war efforts against Germany and won an invite at the Versailles Peace Conference.
- But the West sided with the Japanese and China refused to sign the Versailles Peace Treaty.
- A few years later, the United States helped reach a peace deal between China and Germany.

China – America's forgotten ally:

- World War II saw strong U.S.-China collaboration against the Japanese.
 - These old trans-Pacific linkages of the U.S. and China, including the presence of a very large Chinese community on the west coast of the U.S., are not well known, but China is really "the forgotten ally" of the U.S.

- The U.S. included China in the 'Four Policemen' - a group of the most important countries for ensuring world peace post- WorldWar II, along with the U.S., the USSR and the U.K.
 - The U.S. also thought that China would act as a bulwark against the USSR.
- This later became P-5, with France being added by the UK in 1945 where the UN charter was finalised.
 - The pure multilateralism of the League of Nations was thus infused with multipolarity.
- The Republic of China (RoC) retained the UN seat of China until 1971 when it was expelled from the UN and the People's Republic of China (PRC) admitted as a member.
- U.S. President Richard Nixon visited Beijing in 1972 and the U.S.'s opening to the PRC paved the way for the unprecedented economic growth of China.

Institutional transformations:

- Multilateralism is under unprecedented stress fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic and a certain disenchantment with globalisation.
- At the root, of course, is the rise of China and its challenge to U.S. global hegemony.
- For global action, there is a need for multilateralism backed by strong multipolarity relevant to contemporary realities. This demands institutional reform and not just engagement with extant issues.
- Most important are institutional reforms in the [UN Security Council \(UNSC\)](#) and at the Bretton Woods Institutions so that their governance leverages the capabilities of the major players among both the developed and developing countries.

Best way forward for India:

- India has been elected as a non-permanent member of the UNSC for a two-year term.
- India will also host the BRICS Summit next year and G-20 Summit in 2022.
- These are openings for India in uniting the world in critical areas that require global cooperation especially climate change, pandemics and counter-terrorism.
- India needs to invest in the UN with increased financial contributions in line with its share of the world economy and by placing its people in key multilateral positions.
- It is an opportune moment for India and a Reformed Multilateralism.
- India, Germany, Japan and Brazil (G-4) have sought to refocus the UN on UNSC reform.
- As proponents of reform, they must remain focused and determined.

Read more on "India's call for UNCS Reforms" covered in the [23rd September 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Category: ECONOMY

1. Hope amid uncertainty

Context:

- IMF in its latest World Economic Outlook has called for more international cooperation as the world economy recovers slowly.
- COVID-19 has already claimed over a million lives. The pandemic has led to the loss of livelihoods and a fall in output in economies.
- [IMF](#) sums up the challenges ahead in the report's title: 'A long and difficult ascent'.

Details:

- The Fund's economists have sought to make forecasts for world output through 2020, 2021 and into the medium term.
- While the global economy is projected to shrink 4.4% in 2020-21, reflecting a less severe contraction than the 5.2% drop estimated in June 2020, the output is seen rebounding at a marginally slower 5.2% pace in 2021.
 - The IMF has based its revision on "better-than-anticipated second-quarter GDP out-turns, mostly in advanced economies" where activity improved after lockdowns were eased, as well as signs of a stronger recovery.
- IMF Chief Economist contends that global growth will gradually slow to about 3.5% in the medium term. It is pointed out that the pandemic is set to leave scars well into the medium term as:
 - Labour markets take time to heal.
 - Investment is held back by uncertainty and balance sheet problems.
 - Lost schooling impairs human capital.

Challenges:

- The IMF has pointed out that even as the world economy rises out of the depths it had plunged to; there remains the danger of resurgence in infections.
 - This has prompted countries in Europe to reimpose at least partial closures.
- The uncertainty is magnified by the risks associated with predicting the pandemic's progression, the unevenness of public health responses, and the extent to which domestic activity can be disrupted.
- With the cumulative loss in output relative to the pre-pandemic projected path, efforts to improve average living standards are certain to be severely set back.

Way forward:

- The pandemic is set to widen inequality between economies and within nations, the Fund has, therefore, urged greater international cooperation.
- All countries must work closely to ensure that new treatments and vaccines are made available to all.
 - Wider and faster availability of medical solutions could boost global income by almost \$9 trillion by end-2025, reducing income divergence.
- IMF has stressed the need for policymakers to plan out direct income support for the most vulnerable.
- It has suggested that regulatory restraint is necessary to save stressed but viable firms.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Channapatna Toys

- Channapatna toys are a form of wooden toys and dolls that are manufactured in the town of Channapatna in Karnataka.

This topic has been covered in [31st August 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

G. Tidbits

1. 'Policy delay hurting edible oil security'

What's in News?

According to Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA), the delay in the roll-out of the National Oilseed Mission was hurting India's edible oil security.

Details:

- The delay in the announcement is a cause of concern as raw material supply is reducing and the dependence on import of edible oil is rising year after year.
- To curb imports, the SEA had been advocating cultivation of soybean, sunflower, maize and mustard in Punjab and Haryana via a shift in crop pattern from rice in Kharif and wheat in Rabi season.

Note:

Solvent Extractors' Association of India is the apex body of the Indian vegetable oil industry.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to the Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) :

1. It is an array of three hundred fully steerable parabolic radio telescopes.
2. It is located in Narayangaon, near Pune in India.
3. It is operated by the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Giant Metrewave Radio Telescope (GMRT) is an array of thirty fully steerable parabolic radio telescopes.
- It is located in Narayangaon, near Pune in India.
- It is operated by the National Centre for Radio Astrophysics of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research.

Q2. Which of the following statements best describes "Knesset"?

- a. It is the unicameral national legislature of Israel.
- b. It is a special type of legal assembly, in the traditional code of laws of the Pashtun people.
- c. It is the federal authority of the United Arab Emirates formed to represent the general Emirati people.

- d. It is a mass national gathering that brings together representatives from the various ethnic, religious, and tribal communities in Afghanistan.

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Knesset is the unicameral national legislature of Israel.
- As the legislative branch of the Israeli government, the Knesset passes all laws, elects the President and Prime Minister (although the latter is ceremonially appointed by the President), approves the cabinet, and supervises the work of the government.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to the New START Treaty:

1. It is a treaty for cooperation in the field of nuclear energy.
2. The treaty was signed between the United States, the Russian Federation and China.
3. New START replaced the Treaty of Moscow (SORT).

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

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 3 only
- d. None of the above

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- New START is a nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation with the formal name of Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms.
- It is the last major nuclear arms reduction accord between Russia and the U.S.
- The New START deal was signed in April 2010 but went into force in February 2011.
- New START replaced the Treaty of Moscow (SORT), which was due to expire in December 2012.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to 'Reed Bank' island:

1. It is an oil-rich and gas-rich island located in the Caspian Sea.
2. The disputed island is claimed by Turkey and Greece.

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

The oil-rich and gas-rich Reed Bank Island is located in the South China Sea. The disputed island is claimed by the People's Republic of China and the Philippines.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. With the pandemic posing a hurdle to China in its march to global hegemony, the time is opportune for India to push for institutional changes and reformed multilateralism in the global system. Discuss. (GS 2 International Relations) (15 Marks, 250 Words)
2. Is increasing the Minimum Support Price (MSP) the best measure to address farmers' distress? Critically examine. Discuss the role of MSP as a tool to ensure food security in India. (GS 3 Economy) (15 Marks, 250 Words).