

19 Oct 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Iran hails lifting of UN arms embargo

Context:

- The UN embargo on arms sales to and from the Islamic Republic of Iran expired recently in line with the **2015 nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action)**.

Background:

- The U.S. withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran in 2018 and unilaterally began re-imposing sanctions on Iran.
- The US tried to push for an indefinite arms embargo on Iran but failed to win support from the [UN Security Council](#) on this issue.

Details:

- Restrictions on the transfer of arms, related activities and financial services to and from the Islamic Republic of Iran would be progressively terminated. This would **allow Iran to procure arms and equipment from any source without any legal restrictions.**
- The progressive lifting of the embargo on the sale of conventional arms to Iran marks the **normalisation of Iran's defence cooperation with the world.**

US reaction:

- The U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has stated that the U.S. would be using its domestic authorities to sanction any individual or entity that materially contributes to the supply, sale, or transfer of conventional arms to or from Iran.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. 'Jagan's letter an affront to judiciary'

Context:

- Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister (CM) Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy's letter to the Chief Justice of India complaining about the functioning of a few judges.

For more information on this development, refer to:

[CNA dated Oct 18, 2020: Jagan vs Judges](#)

Details:

- Former Supreme Court (SC) judge V. Gopala Gowda has described the letter written by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy to the Chief Justice of India (CJI) as an "affront to a vibrant judiciary".

Concerns expressed:

- The former SC judge argues against the manner of the release of the letter in the public domain. The public disclosure of the letter could have **compromised the dignity, independence and majesty of the top court and the A.P. High Court.**
- The former SC judge feels that the manner of the letter's release at a press conference could amount to scandalising the judiciary in the eyes of the people by **sensationalising the issue** and could also be deemed an interference with the administration of justice. Mr. Gowda said the Chief Minister should have **taken up the matter confidentially with the CJI.**
- Aspersions and allegations against sitting judges ought not to be made without substantive and positive evidence as in such cases the **faith of the people in the judiciary and the rule of law are at stake.**

- **Article 121 and Article 211 of the Indian Constitution** expressly bar Parliament and the state legislatures to discuss the conduct of any judge.
- The SC in the **Ravichandran Iyer v. Justice A.M. Bhattacharjee (1995)** case has held that complaints against sitting judges should be kept confidential.

Counter-arguments:

- With respect to the question of whether such a letter/complaint against the Supreme Court judge should have been put out in the public domain, one aspect that needs to be considered is that the confidentiality of complaints may lead to complaints being shelved as the judiciary tends to try and brush aside complaints of corruption against judges. If the public becomes aware of such complaints, the CJI is compelled to order an inquiry.

Way forward:

- The code of conduct requires an inquiry by three sitting judges of the Supreme Court. But in a complaint involving the senior-most judge, it is unlikely that junior judges will conduct a robust and credible inquiry.
- **Only retired judges of high credibility would be able to conduct a robust inquiry into the current complaint.** The Chief Justice should set up a credible inquiry committee. This will enhance the reputation of the judiciary, dispel mistruths, and redeem the image of the judge concerned.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Celebrating skinks, ZSI lists 62 species in India

Context:

- The recently released **publication ‘Skinks of India’** by the [Zoological Survey of India \(ZSI\)](#).

Details:

- The publication notes **India is home to 62 species of skinks, with about 57% (33 species) of these being endemic.**
 - With about 1,602 species of skinks across the world, skinks constitute the largest family of lizards. However, their **occurrence in India is less than 4 % of the global diversity.**
- Skinks have long bodies, relatively small or no legs, no pronounced neck and glossy scales.
- Skinks actively **forage for a variety of insects and small invertebrates and have a prominent role in maintaining ecosystems.**
- Skinks are **common reptiles** found in all kinds of habitats across the country in **every bio-geographic zone.**
 - Biogeography deals with the geographical distribution of plants and animals. The bio-geographic zones of India include the following:
 - Trans Himalayas
 - Himalayas
 - Indian desert
 - Western Ghats
 - Semi-arid

- Deccan peninsula
- Gangetic plains
- Coasts
- North-eastern India
- Islands

Category: ECONOMY

1. GST cess will stay: finance panel chief

Context:

- The **15th Finance Commission** Chairman's comments on the GST compensation issue.

Background:

For information on the GST compensation issue, refer to:

[CNA dated Aug 11, 2020: Making up for shortfalls in GST collection](#)

15th Finance Commission report:

- The Finance Commission's report on the devolution of funds between the Centre and the States for the **five-year period of 2021-22 till 2025-2026**, would be submitted to the government by the end of October 2020.
- The Report would also factor in unpaid compensation dues to the States.

Details:

- The Chairperson of the Fifteenth Finance Commission N.K. Singh has stated that given the fact that Compensation cess shortfalls cannot be met from the Consolidated Fund of India, there is **the need for some form of borrowing arrangement to meet the compensation cess collection shortfalls.**
- The GST council has approved the **extension of the levy of compensation cess on Goods and Services Tax (GST) beyond the previously decided 2022**, perhaps till as late as 2025-26, to pay off the States' GST dues.
 - GST compensation cess is levied on goods such as cars, aerated drinks and tobacco products, over and above the highest GST rate of 28%.
- Both the States and the Centre are said to be working towards a consensus on this GST compensation issue within the **GST Council.**
 - The Centre might be borrowing Rs. 1.1 lakh crore on behalf of States and lend it onward to the states to compensate them for the shortfalls.
 - In addition, the states would also be allowed to **additionally borrow up to 0.5% of GSDP.** These provisions would give the states around Rs. 2.16-lakh crore, or almost 90% of the compensation shortfall.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

Category: NUTRITION

1. No great escape

Context:

- The article analyzes the **nutrition challenge in India**.

Background:

Poor GHI ranking:

- 2020's **Global Hunger Index (GHI)** ranks **India 94th among 107 countries** while terming the national nutrition situation as “serious”.
 - The GHI is developed around wasting and stunting (under five), the share of the population with insufficient caloric intake, and child mortality.
- **India's score of 27.2 in the GHI** is the worst among BRICS countries, and lower than even countries with much lower per capita incomes like Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal.

Study on food affordability in India:

- The recent findings of the International Food Policy Research Institute scholars show that **three out of four rural Indians cannot afford a balanced, nutritious diet**.

For more information on this issue, refer to:

[CNA dated Oct 18, 2020: '76% of rural Indians can't afford nutritious diet'](#)

NFHS-4 findings:

- The NFHS-4 of 2015-16 found that under-five stunting from chronic undernourishment stood at 38%, and wasting as a result of acute lack of nutrition, at 21%.

Concerns:

- The above observations are evidence of the nutrition challenge that India faces.
- Despite some progress, at a drop of about 10 percentage points in child stunting and wasting as compared to a decade earlier, this rate of decline is not commensurate with the economic growth witnessed in India over the years. **India's poor progress on nutritional indices runs contrary to the strong economic growth witnessed in India over the years.**
- The existing deprivation has been aggravated by the pandemic, with **food inflation putting pressure on depleted incomes** or meagre pensions and savings.
- The measures taken by the centre to eliminate leakages and diversion in the PDS system like the insistence on biometric verification to get supplies could deprive the disabled and the elderly of even cereals.

Way forward:

- There is a need for a **revamped [PDS](#)**.

Increasing reach:

- The benefits of the National Food Security Act must reach everyone. The right to food would be meaningless if it leaves a large section of Indians hungry, stunted and wasted.

Diet diversity:

- There is a need to overcome the false equation between energy calories and nourishing diets.
- PDS should not merely focus on hunger mitigation through cereals, but widen its scope to nourishment through a diverse diet that includes fat, protein and micronutrients. There is a need to pay attention to **achieving diet diversity through the PDS**.

Focus on high impact interventions:

- There is the need for a radical transformation in the **delivery of adequate nutrition especially to women and children** to address the issue of hunger, wasting and stunting among children.
- Strengthening the PDS, with a focus on women's health, would lead to healthier pregnancies, and stronger supplemental nutrition under the ICDS scheme would give children a better chance at all-round development.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. The hues in the green tribunal's resilient journey

Context:

- The 10th anniversary of the **[National Green Tribunal \(NGT\)](#)**.

Background:

- The **high number and complexity of cases** with respect to subjects dealt with by the Ministry of Environment and Forests and the inability of the judiciary to deal with such litigations in a time-bound manner had resulted in inordinate delays in several processes related to the Environment Ministry.
- This led to the argument that the **enforcement, protection, and adjudication of environmental laws required a specialised and dedicated body** giving rise to the National Green Tribunal (NGT).

NGT:

- The NGT is a specialised body set up under **the National Green Tribunal Act (2010)** for **effective and expeditious disposal of cases** relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources.
- The Principal Bench of the NGT is in New Delhi. It has regional benches in Pune (West), Bhopal (Central), Chennai (South) and Kolkata (East).
- The tribunal is mandated to make and endeavour for **disposal of applications or appeals finally within 6 months of the filing of the same**.

- The Chairperson of the NGT is a retired Judge of the Supreme Court. Other judicial members are retired Judges of High Courts. **Each bench of the NGT will comprise at least one Judicial Member and one Expert Member.**
 - Expert members should have a professional qualification and a minimum of 15 years of experience in the field of environment/forest conservation and related subjects.
- It shall be guided by the **principles of sustainable development, the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle.**
- An appeal against order/decision/award of the NGT lies to the Supreme Court, generally within ninety days from the date of communication.
- The NGT deals with the following seven laws related to the environment:
 - The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974,
 - The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977,
 - The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980,
 - The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981,
 - The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986,
 - The Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991 and
 - The Biological Diversity Act, 2002.

Significance:

Track record:

- Over 10 years, the NGT has made a difference to **environmental protection**. Since its inception, the NGT has helped protect vast areas of forest land, halted polluting construction activities in metros and smaller towns.
- It has penalised errant officials who have turned a blind eye towards enforcing the environmental laws, and held large corporate entities accountable for their polluting activities.
 - NGT can provide **relief and compensation to the victims of pollution** and other environmental damage and also **call for restitution of the environment**.
- It has protected the rights of tribal communities and ensured the enforcement of the “polluter pays” principle in letter and spirit.

Technical expertise:

- The fact that the NGT is staffed with environmental experts ensured a better understanding of the cases and subsequently **improved the quality of the judgments**.

Speedy justice:

- The Tribunal's dedicated jurisdiction in environmental matters shall provide **speedy environmental justice**.

Reduced burden on judiciary:

- The NGT has helped reduce the burden of litigation in the higher courts.

Concerns:

- The central **government's move to dilute the criteria for appointments to the NGT** and other tribunals could impede the effective functioning of the NGT.
- Two important acts - [Wildlife \(Protection\) Act, 1972](#) and Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 have been kept out of NGT's jurisdiction.

- Without clear cut guidelines on the right to appeal against NGT orders, **the NGT decisions are being challenged in higher courts**, which has led to the dilution of the advantage that the NGT would reduce the burden on the judiciary and also aid in speedy justice.
- The **high level of vacancies** is a cause of concern which is impeding the NGT's ability to deal with the cases in a time bound manner.
- **The limited number of regional benches** is also a concern.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Still awaiting police reform

Context:

- The article analyzes the issue of police reforms in India.

Background:

Recent instances of police excesses:

- Cases of police brutality reported from Madhya Pradesh where a Dalit Ahirwar couple was assaulted by the police and the custodial deaths in Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu.
- A gangster, Vikas Dubey, was killed by the Uttar Pradesh police in Kanpur when he allegedly tried to flee from custody. The incident had raised serious questions on whether the law had been subverted.

Prakash Singh case, 2006:

- **The National Police Commission (NPC) was set up in 1977** to suggest reforms in the police machinery.
- The NPC submitted eight reports to the Ministry of Home Affairs between 1979 and 1981. The report was not acted upon. Prakash Singh, a retired IPS officer, had filed a [PIL](#) in the SC in 1996 demanding the implementation of the NPC's recommendations.

Concerns:

Non-implementation of SC guidelines:

- Despite clear guidelines provided by the SC under the **Prakash Singh case of 2006**, there has been lackadaisical implementation.
 - Not all states have constituted a **State Security Commission (SSC)** and of the States that constituted an SSC, only Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka have made SSC recommendations binding on the state government.
 - Only six states have provided a minimum tenure of two years to the Director-General of Police (DGP).
 - Many states have not implemented a single directive of the Supreme Court.

Politicians-criminals-police nexus:

- This lack of political will seems to be indicative of the **politicians-criminals-police nexus**.

- Some politicians and even bureaucrats are known to be corrupt and mired in crime. According to a report by the Association for Democratic Reforms (2018), there were 1,580 MPs and MLAs facing criminal charges.

Way forward:

- Given the lack of political will to implement police reforms, it is for **the judiciary to step in and enforce the provisions it had passed**.
- The Court has to come down heavily on the States and the Centre to ensure that its directives are not dismissed lightly.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Standing crops ruined by the Bhima in Kalaburagi

- The Bhima River (also known as Chandrabhaga River) is a **major tributary of the Krishna River**.
- It originates near Bhimashankar Temple in the Bhimashankar hills in Pune District, Maharashtra state.
- It flows through Maharashtra and Karnataka and seventy-five percent of the basin lies in the state of Maharashtra.
- Bhima merges into the Krishna along the border between Karnataka and Telangana.
- Major tributaries of the Bhima river are the Sina and Nira rivers.

Context:

- River Bhima has been wreaking havoc in Karnataka's Kalaburagi district with the flooding resulting in widespread damage to life and property.

G. Tidbits

1. 3 IS operatives from Hyderabad convicted by NIA special court

- Three Islamic State (IS) operatives from Hyderabad were among the 15 people sentenced to rigorous imprisonment by a special court for the **National Investigation Agency (NIA)** cases in New Delhi. They were **sentenced for radicalising youth via social media**.
- The case pertains to criminal conspiracy by the ISIS to establish its base in India by recruiting youth using different social media platforms.

2. Post-lockdown, rights of domestic workers in focus

- Domestic workers had to face denial of salaries, loss of employment during the nationwide lockdown, which had resulted in an economic crisis among this vulnerable section. There have also been reports of harassment by employers and Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs). This has brought into focus the need for **safeguarding the rights of domestic workers**.
- Some of the major measures in this direction could involve a minimum cash transfer, **universal registration of employers and workers**, an **urban employment guarantee scheme** and

strengthening of local committees where workers can complain about sexual harassment at workplace.

- The government could also consider the **inclusion of domestic workers under the social security code** and a comprehensive legislation for the domestic workers.

3. India past COVID peak, says DST panel

- The modelling study, called the “**COVID-19 India National Supermodel**”, carried out under the **seven-member expert panel commissioned by the Department of Science and Technology** has stated that India has passed its COVID peak in September and, if current trends continue, there will be “minimal cases” by February.
- This, however, is premised on no spikes being triggered by festivals or mutations in the virus aiding its spread in winter.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

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

1. The Bhima originates in the Belgaum district of Karnataka.
2. The majority of its catchment area or basin area is spread across the state of Karnataka.
3. It is a major tributary of the Godavari River.

Options:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Bhima River is a major tributary of the Krishna River.
- It originates near Bhimashankar Temple in the Bhimashankar hills in Pune District, Maharashtra state.
- It flows through Maharashtra and Karnataka and seventy-five percent of the basin lies in the state of Maharashtra.
- Bhima merges into the Krishna along the border between Karnataka and Telangana.
- Major tributaries of the Bhima river are the Sina and Nira rivers.

Q2. Which of the following are parameters considered in the compilation of the Global Hunger Index?

1. Under-nourishment
2. Child wasting
3. Child stunting
4. Child mortality
5. Anaemia

6. Nutritional deficiency diseases

Options:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The four indicators considered for the compilation of the GHI include the following:
 - **UNDERNOURISHMENT:** the share of the population that is undernourished (that is, whose caloric intake is insufficient);
 - **CHILD WASTING:** the share of children under the age of five who are wasted (that is, who have low weight for their height, reflecting acute undernutrition);
 - **CHILD STUNTING:** the share of children under the age of five who are stunted (that is, who have low height for their age, reflecting chronic undernutrition); and
 - **CHILD MORTALITY:** the mortality rate of children under the age of five (in part, a reflection of the fatal mix of inadequate nutrition and unhealthy environments).

Q3. Which of the following laws does not come under the ambit of the National Green Tribunal?

- a. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977
- b. Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- c. The Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991
- d. The Biological Diversity Act, 2002.

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The NGT deals with the following seven laws related to the environment:
 - The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974,
 - The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977,
 - The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980,
 - The Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981,
 - The Environment (Protection) Act, 1986,
 - The Public Liability Insurance Act, 1991 and
 - The Biological Diversity Act, 2002.
- Two important acts - Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 and Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 have been kept out of NGT's jurisdiction.

Q4. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to the National Food Security Act?

1. The Act legally entitles up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidized foodgrains under the Targeted Public Distribution System.
2. It also recognizes some maternity entitlements.

Options:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The [National Food Security Act, 2013](#) legally entitles up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population to receive subsidized foodgrains under the Targeted Public Distribution System. About two-thirds of the population, therefore, is covered under the Act to receive highly subsidised foodgrains.
- Under the provisions of the Act, beneficiaries of the PDS are entitled to 5 kilograms per person per month of cereals at the following prices:
 - Rice at Rs. 3 per kg
 - Wheat at Rs. 2 per kg
 - Coarse grains (millet) at Rs. 1 per kg
- Pregnant women, lactating mothers, and certain categories of children are eligible for daily free cereals.
- It includes the Midday Meal Scheme, Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme and the Public Distribution System (PDS).

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In light of the many indications of poor nutritional status in India, suggest measures required to overcome this nutrition challenge in India. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 2/Nutrition)
2. Analyze the performance of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) over the years and evaluate its achievements and shortcomings. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 3/Environment and Ecology)

