

20 Oct 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Australia to take part in Malabar naval exercise](#)

Context:

- The Ministry of Defence of India has announced that **Australia will participate in the Malabar 2020 naval exercise**, consisting of India, Japan and the U.S.

Background:

- Australia had first requested to join the [Malabar naval exercises](#) more than three years ago but **India had been reluctant** over possible concerns that such a move would antagonize China.
- However, the **on-going [stand-off with China along the LAC](#)** seems to have convinced India of the strategic significance of including Australia in the Malabar naval exercise.

For related information, refer to:

[CNA dated July 20, 2020: Make the right call on Malabar going 'Quad'](#)

Details:

- The move to include Australia comes in the backdrop of India seeking to increase cooperation with other countries in the maritime security domain and in the light of **increased defence cooperation with Australia**.
- In June 2020, India and Australia signed the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) and also announced a joint declaration on a shared vision for maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
- The move to include Australia will **formally bring together the militaries of the four countries in the Quad group** - India, Australia, Japan and the United States. This showcases the increasing relevance of cooperation between the four major **Indo-Pacific democracies** and their shared will to work together on common security interests.
- High-end military exercises like Malabar would play a key role in enhancing the participant nations' maritime capabilities, **building interoperability with each other**.
- The exercise is scheduled to be held in November-end. This year, the exercise has been planned on a 'non-contact - at sea' format.

[2. It's China that happens to have the cash now, says Sri Lanka Minister](#)

Context:

- Sri Lanka's borrowing from China.

Background:

- The **pandemic has had a detrimental impact on the already fragile economy of Sri Lanka (SL)**.
 - The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have forecasted a GDP contraction of up to almost 7% for SL. It is witnessing falling revenues and rising living costs.
 - SL also **faces \$4.5 billion foreign debt** due in the coming year.

Details:

SL's increasing economic reliance on China:

- The SL administration has **sought a new \$700 million loan from China**. This would be in addition to the already sanctioned \$500 million loan in March 2020. **Sri Lanka owes China over \$5 billion so far**.
- Sri Lanka is also negotiating a nearly \$1.5-billion currency swap facility with the People's Bank of China.

Criticism:

- Government critics and the Opposition in Sri Lanka have raised concerns over the current administration's growing reliance on China. They have instead advocated the administration to engage with the [IMF](#) rather than fall into a **"Chinese debt trap"**.

SL government's response:

- The government has ruled out an IMF bailout. The Minister in charge has brushed aside the concerns stating that given that currently, China has huge reserves of cash it is natural that it will invest all over the world including SL.

India-SL relation:

- The **Reserve Bank of India had signed a \$400 million swap agreement with Sri Lanka** in July, to help boost Sri Lanka's foreign reserves, and is considering a further \$1 billion requested by Sri Lanka.
- India is **yet to respond to SL's request for a debt moratorium**.
 - Sri Lanka owes \$ 960 million to India.

For related information, refer to:

[CNA dated June 28, 2020: Colombo plea for postponing debt repayment hangs fire](#)

[CNA dated Feb 12, 2020: First call](#)

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Centre said to ask at least eight PSUs to consider buy-backs

Context:

- Reports of the central government having asked at least eight state-run companies to consider share buy-backs in the current fiscal year.

Details:

- The firms asked to consider **share buybacks** include miner Coal India, power utility NTPC, minerals producer NMDC and Engineers India Ltd.
 - A buyback occurs when the issuing company pays shareholders the market value per share and re-absorbs that portion of its ownership that was previously distributed among public and private investors.
- The move to ask the PSUs to buy back shares is part of the **central government's measures to raise funds to rein in its fiscal deficit**.
 - **India is highly unlikely to meet its [fiscal deficit](#) target of 3.5% of GDP for 2020/21** as the pandemic induced curbs hit tax collections substantially and have also delayed governmental efforts to raise funds through disinvestment like the proposal to privatise Bharat Petroleum Corp. and flag carrier Air India.
- Buy-back could prove to be an important tool for the government as apart from raising revenues it also helps in **building market price for the PSU shares**.

Challenges:

- Some PSUs, particularly in the oil sector, may not be able to do buybacks due to the following reasons:

- The **government's stake in them is about 51%** and any further reduction will end up in the government giving up its position as a majority holder.
- These PSUs also face competing claims on their cash in the form of **huge capex commitment and dividend payments**.

Additional information:

- In February, the government had set itself a target of raising more than \$27 billion from **privatisations and sale of minority stakes in state-owned companies** in the ongoing fiscal year.
- The **government's new policy for public sector enterprises**, which will notify strategic sectors where at least one public unit needs to operate, is being finalised and will be put up for the Union Cabinet's approval soon.
- The government had **tasked 23 state-run companies with capital expenditure of Rs. 1.65 trillion (\$22.5 billion) in the current fiscal year**. This move is aimed at increasing public expenditure to aid the economic recovery process in India.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. Dormant but waiting to strike

Context:

- The article authored by R.K. Raghavan, former CBI director analyzes the threat posed by terror outfits to India.

Background:

- **During the pandemic, open terror attacks have been reducing**, mostly because the terror outfits have been lacking adequate resources and because of temporary loss of support.

Details:

- The author warns that the temporary lull in terrorist activities should not lead to complacency given the resilience exhibited by the terrorist organizations in the past.
- The terror outfits like al-Qaeda, Islamic State, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) continue to pose threats to modern society, especially to India and its neighbourhood.
 - Al-Qaeda and Islamic State have a global reach backed by global ambitions and continue to be the two most organised and motivated groups. The other outfits — JeM, LeT, etc. — are confined to the Afghanistan-Pakistan area.
- The **terror outfits are still relevant to India's security calculus**.

Concerns:

Continued operation:

- The underground dormant terrorist cells are probably engaged in the quiet process of garnering resources for future lethal assaults against India and other countries in the neighbourhood. Once the pandemic eases, we may see a resurgence of terror.
- There have been **reports of outfits like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State reorganising and rebuilding during the pandemic** with unabated recruitment.

Impact of the pandemic:

- The aggravation of **poverty in developing nations due to COVID-19** could offer a fertile ground for recruitment and intensified religious indoctrination.

Implications of Doha Accord for India:

- The **Doha Accord between the [Taliban](#) and the U.S.** could have some adverse implications for India.
 - Under the accord, the U.S. has agreed to a near-total withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan in return for the Taliban's promise to preserve peace in Afghanistan, while also keeping the al-Qaeda under check.
- Given that the Taliban and the al-Qaeda need each other in many areas and the fact that both are friendly towards Pakistan, this could pose serious security problems for India in the near future.

Presence in India:

- The terrorist organizations have been successful in alluring misguided youth in India.
- The **recent raids by the [National Investigation Agency](#) point to an al-Qaeda network in India.** In one such raid, nine activists belonging to Kerala and West Bengal were arrested for conspiring to attack various targets, including the National Capital Region.

State-sponsored terrorism:

- Terrorist organizations like the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) continue to receive aid and support from the Pakistani establishment. There have also been reports of these terror outfits receiving training support from the Pakistani Army.
- There is always the threat of al-Qaeda along with other terror outfits in and around Pakistan, escalating the offensive against India.

Use of technology:

- The **increasing sophistication of technology** has allowed the terror organizations to continue to communicate and also amass financial resources and recruit people remotely.
- The prospect of individuals being indoctrinated by terror ideologies and carrying out **lone-wolf terror activities** has increased over time.

Steps to be taken:

- To deal with the menace of terrorism there is the need for a comprehensive strategy.

Funding:

- The main sources of funding for these terror outfits constitute donations from supportive countries, earnings from drug and arms trafficking, issuing of fake Indian currency notes and other kinds of organized crime.
- **India's move against Pakistan at the [FATF](#)** would force Pakistan to implement measures to tackle terror financing in and through Pakistan. **Preventive measures to tackle organized crime across the border** would help cut a major source of funding for terrorist organizations operating within India.

Institutional framework:

- The changes made after 26/11 should be followed up with measures that will further strengthen and make more effective the functioning of institutions like the **National Investigation Agency (NIA), NATGRID.**
- The Proposed **National Counter Terrorism Centre** should be established at the earliest.
- There should be uninterrupted intelligence gathering and their dissemination among the institutions dealing with terrorism in India.

For related information, refer to:

[CNA dated Nov 20, 2019: Network for intel agencies to share info will go live next year](#)

- The **state police force**, which constitutes the first response to any terror attack should be adequately **trained and armed** to deal with terror attacks.

Legal framework:

- There is the need for a **stringent comprehensive special act** that deals with all aspects of terrorism. Well-defined laws will allow for swift prosecution.
- There is a need for **regular revision and tightening of laws** to ensure that the existing loopholes and gaps in legal mechanisms are not exploited to continue with the propagation of radical ideologies.

De-radicalization:

- The government and the security agencies need to adopt a multi-pronged approach towards radicalisation. The state agencies need to **work with civil society groups as well as community leaders and have deradicalisation programmes.**
 - Example: 'Prevent' programme in the U.K.
- There is a need to focus attention on potential target groups through monitoring and infiltration of social media sites that are the principal source of radical propaganda.
- **Big data analytics** must be used to discern the level of radicalization of potential recruits, their networks and sources of information, funding and leadership in order to help unravel the roots of radicalization.

International efforts:

- India should continue to pursue its efforts at establishing the **Global Terror Convention or Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT).**
 - CCIT is a proposed treaty which intends to outlaw all forms of terrorism (international) and restrict terrorists, their financiers the access to all form of supports like funds, arms, and safe havens.

Category: HEALTH

1. Many gains in fighting HIV

Context:

- The recently released 2019 HIV estimates by the **National AIDS Control Organization (NACO)** of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare with the technical support of [UNAIDS](#).

Details:

- The 2019 HIV estimates note that there has been a **66.1% reduction in new HIV infections among children and a 65.3% reduction in AIDS-related deaths in India over a nine-year period**. This indicates India's progress in reducing the HIV impact on children through the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.
- Also, the number of pregnant women living with HIV has reduced and treatment coverage has also expanded.

Steps taken:

- The '**Fast-Tracking of EMTCT (elimination of mother-to-child transmission) strategy-cum-action plan**' of NACO, aiming to achieve EMTCT, has been instrumental in mobilising all national, State and partners' collective efforts.
- The progress can be mainly attributed to **education and communication programmes; increased access to HIV services** with innovative delivery mechanisms for HIV testing; counselling and care; and treatment and follow-ups.
 - India made HIV testing for all pregnant women free and HIV treatment is offered the same way nationwide without cost to pregnant mothers living with HIV through the national 'treat all' policy.

Way forward:

- Despite the impressive progress made thus far, there remains a need for increased treatment saturation coverage and for early HIV testing and treatment initiation to become the normal.
- Using data-driven and decision-making approaches can help in this regard.

Additional information:

90-90-90 strategy:

- 90-90-90 marks the treatment target to help end the AIDS epidemic.
- Although many strategies will be needed to halt the AIDS epidemic, it will be impossible to end the epidemic without bringing HIV treatment to all who need it.
 - There are the envisaged goals of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.
- The main targets under the 90-90-90 strategy include the following:
 - By 2020, 90% of all people living with HIV will know their HIV status.
 - By 2020, 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained antiretroviral therapy.
 - By 2020, 90% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy will have viral suppression.

For related information, refer to:

[CNA dated Dec 3, 2019: Taking stock of the anti-AIDS fight](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. 'India may produce 310 lakh tonnes of sugar'

- Based on the total sugarcane expected to be crushed by sugar mills during the ongoing **sugar season (October 2020 to September 2021)**, estimates of sugar production stand at 330.23 lakh tonnes.
- However, as a significant quantity of **sugarcane juice and B-molasses would be diverted for ethanol production**, the actual sugar production is expected to be close to 310 lakh tonnes.
- Given that the expected production is higher than the probable domestic sales, India will need to continue to export about 60 lakh tonnes of the surplus sugar to **ensure optimal price discovery for sugar in the domestic market**.

Facts:

- **Brazil has historically been the world's largest sugar producer** but ceded its place to India in the 2018/2019 crop year. Currently, however, Brazil continues to remain the largest sugar producer in the world. **India is the world's second-largest producer after Brazil.**
- The major sugar-producing states in India include **Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra**.

G. Tidbits

1. India setting up a robust vaccine delivery system: PM

- Speaking at the launch of the **Grand Challenges Annual Meeting**, the Indian Prime Minister highlighted India's adoption of a "flexible" lockdown approach which has helped it to keep death rates from [COVID-19](#) relatively low.
 - The three-day programme is being organised by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology, the Indian Council of Medical Research and NITI Aayog.
 - The programme aims to bring together policymakers and scientific leaders, calling for scientific collaboration in solving global health problems, with emphasis on the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).
- The PM also highlighted **India's prowess in low-cost vaccine manufacturing** and efforts in vaccine development. India is also taking up efforts to put up a well-established **vaccine delivery system** in place to ensure immunisation of citizens.

2. Adapt to the changing nature of jobs: Modi

- The Indian Prime Minister, while delivering the University of Mysore's centenary convocation address, has called upon the **youth to be flexible and adaptable to the changing nature of jobs**. The PM emphasised the importance of "**skilling, reskilling and upskilling**" in the modern-day world.
- **Start-ups** are envisaged to be a strong pillar of growth for India in the coming years.
- The recently unveiled [National Education Policy 2020](#) emphasizes on a multi-dimensional approach towards education and would help bring about much needed fundamental changes in the field of education and help empower youngsters of the nation.

3. 6 Russian military officers charged for cyberattacks

- According to a US Justice Department indictment unsealed recently, six current and former Russian military officers in the Russian military agency known as the GRU, have been alleged of **cyberattacks on a broad range of political, financial and athletic targets**.
 - They have been accused of seeking to disrupt through computer hacking the French election, the 2018 Winter Olympics in South Korea and U.S. hospitals and businesses. They have also been accused of destructive attacks on Ukraine's power grid. Some reports have also blamed them of interference in the 2016 US elections.
- These alleged cyberattacks are indicative of the **weaponizing of cyber capabilities for malicious intentions**.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

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

1. Currently, India is the largest sugar-producing country in the world.
2. Maharashtra is the largest sugar-producing state in India.

Options:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Brazil has historically been the world's largest sugar producer but ceded its place to India in the 2018/2019 crop year. Currently, however, Brazil continues to remain the largest sugar producer in the world. India is the world's second-largest producer after Brazil.
- The major sugar-producing states in India include Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra with UP accounting for the largest production.

Q2. The 'Mutual Logistics Support Agreement' was signed by India with which of the following countries?

- a. Australia
- b. Russia
- c. Japan
- d. The U.S.

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- In June 2020, India and Australia signed the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) and also announced a joint declaration on a shared vision for maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

For information on this, refer to:

[CNA dated Sep 13, 2020: More logistics pacts on the cards](#)

Q3. Who among the following became the first Indian and the first elected president of the Central Legislative Assembly?

- a. G.V. Mavalankar
- b. Vithalbhai J Patel
- c. Sachidanand Sinha
- d. Rajendra Prasad

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Vithalbhai J Patel was the first elected President of the Central Legislative Assembly in 1925 and was re-elected in 1927.
- Vithalbhai J Patel was instrumental in laying down well-defined rules, regulations, practices and procedures for the smooth conduct of the business of the House. A bold defender of the rights and privileges of members, he succeeded in his efforts of creating a separate office for the Legislative Assembly, independent of and unconnected with the Government, in 1928.

Related background:

- The institutions of Speaker and Deputy Speaker originated in India in 1921 under the provisions of the [Government of India Act of 1919](#) (Montague-Chelmsford Reforms).
- At that time, the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker were called the President and Deputy President respectively and the same nomenclature continued till 1947.
- Before 1921, the Governor-General of India used to preside over the meetings of the Central Legislative Council.
- In 1921, Frederick Whyte and Sachidanand Sinha were appointed by the Governor-General of India as the first Speaker and the first Deputy Speaker (respectively) of the Central Legislative Assembly.
- In 1925, Vithalbhai J. Patel became the first Indian and the first elected president of the Central Legislative Assembly.
- The [Government of India Act of 1935](#) changed the nomenclatures of President and Deputy President of the Central Legislative Assembly to Speaker and Deputy Speaker respectively.
- G.V. Mavalankar and Ananthasayanam Ayyangar had the distinction of being the first Speaker and the first Deputy Speaker (respectively) of the Lok Sabha.

Q4. The 90-90-90 strategy is associated with which of the following?

- a. Green House Gas emission mitigation
- b. Poverty alleviation measure
- c. AIDS epidemic
- d. Achieving land degradation neutrality

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- 90-90-90 marks treatment targets to help end the AIDS epidemic.
- Although many strategies will be needed to halt the AIDS epidemic, it will be impossible to end the epidemic without bringing [HIV](#) treatment to all who need it.
 - There are the envisaged goals of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.
- The main targets under the 90-90-90 strategy include the following:
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 - By 2020, 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained antiretroviral therapy.
 - By 2020, 90% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy will have viral suppression.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The temporary lull in terrorist activities should not lead to complacency given the threats posed by the terror outfits to India and its neighbourhood. Comment. Also suggest the measures to be taken by India to counter the threat posed by terrorism. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS Paper 3/Internal Security)
2. Evaluate India's performance in controlling the HIV-AIDS epidemic and suggest what additional measures are required in this direction. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 2/Health)