

27 Oct 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [India to sign geo-spatial cooperation deal with U.S.](#)

Context:

The Defence Ministry has said that India and the U.S. will sign the last foundational agreement, Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geo-Spatial Cooperation (BECA) during the 2+2 ministerial dialogue.

2+2 ministerial dialogue

- It is a format of dialogue where the defense and foreign ministers or secretaries meet with their counterparts from another country.

- The 2+2 dialogue is the highest-level (Ministerial) institutional mechanism between India and the USA. It is aimed at bringing together the perspectives of both the countries on issues relating to foreign policy, defence and other strategic issues.
- India also holds such dialogues with Japan.
- With Australia, the 2+2 dialogue is held at the foreign secretary and defence secretary level.

Background:

- India has already signed three foundational military communication agreements with the US. They are:
 1. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016.
 2. The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018.
 3. General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) – GSOMIA, signed in 2002, paved the way for greater technology cooperation in the military sector.
- An extension to the GSOMIA, the Industrial Security Annex (ISA), was signed at the last 2+2 dialogue (2019).

Details:

- The Defence Minister of India and the U.S. Secretary of Defence reviewed bilateral defence cooperation spanning “military-to-military cooperation, secure communication systems and information sharing, defence trade and industrial issues”.
- Ways to take bilateral cooperation forward were also discussed.

What is BECA?

- BECA is the last of four foundational agreements for strengthening defence ties between India and the US.
- The agreement pertains to exchange of Geospatial-Intelligence information for use by the governments for defence and other purposes.
- Under the agreement, the US would exchange technical and procedural information about standardisation of methods, specifications and formats for the collection, processing and production of geo-intelligence information with India.
- It shall also include the tools and models to process GPS data and transform Latitude, Longitude and Height coordinates across various reference frames and others.

How will it help India?

- It would enhance the geospatial cooperation between the countries.
 - It will allow India and the US to share geospatial and satellite data with each other.
- It is likely to help in improving the accuracy of missile systems of India.
- BECA is an important precursor to India acquiring armed unmanned aerial vehicles such as the Predator-B from the US.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. SC keeps Lokur committee's appointment in abeyance

Context:

The Supreme Court has decided to keep in abeyance - its order appointing former Supreme Court judge Justice Madan B. Lokur to a one-man committee to monitor/prevent stubble burning in Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab.

This topic has been covered in [17th October 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- The decision came in the backdrop of the Solicitor-General informing a Bench led by Chief Justice of India Sharad A. Bobde that the Centre had proposed a legislation to tackle the problem of stubble burning.

2. Centre promises law to check stubble burning**Context:**

The Centre has informed the [Supreme Court](#) that it would bring in a law to address air pollution and check stubble burning in Delhi as well as the surrounding National Capital Region.

- It will be an ordinance for tackling air pollution in NCR and the adjoining areas.
- The ordinance is being drafted by the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change.

Background:

- With an increase in stubble burning, the Ministry of Environment Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) has been tasked with funding the use of subsidised combine harvesters and machinery to dissuade the farmers.

Stubble Burning

- Stubble burning is the burning of rice straw by farmers to clear fields for sowing.
- The paddy residue is not used as fodder as it's unfit and hence farmers burn both the paddy stalk and straw close to autumn every year which is a key contributing factor of pollution causing breathing problems in the northern region.
 - Paddy is a Kharif (monsoon) crop.
 - In Punjab and Haryana, the harvesting of paddy crop is usually done between the first week of October till October end.
- The wheat residue is used as fodder for cattle and it's only the stalk that is set on fire.
 - Wheat is a Rabi (winter) crop.
 - It is sown from late October to December while the harvesting usually starts from mid-April onwards.

Other measures taken to tackle the menace:

- The states have put in efforts towards raising awareness of the ill-effects of stubble burning.
 - Farmers are being educated by the agriculture department regularly about the bad effects of burning fields which kills several crop-friendly insects and causes pollution.

- Penalties are being imposed on farmers as there's a ban on burning the residue.
- To check stubble burning this Kharif (summer) season, the Punjab government has appointed 8,000 nodal officers in villages that grow paddy.
- Over 23,000 crop residue management machines are being given to farmers for on-site management of straw.
- The state had been pressing the Centre to give ₹100 per quintal to farmers for managing the paddy straw without burning.

Way Forward:

- While there are measure and several laws in place for checking pollution, the states lack adequate infrastructure at the level of state and municipal bodies to implement them.
- Better enforcement is the need of the hour.

Note:

- The Delhi NCR has a Graded Response Action Plan, which is overseen by the Environment Pollution Authority.
- It has specified a number of measures that governments must take: from banning diesel gensets to restricting vehicle movement, depending on the degree of pollution.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Contesting neighbours, revised geopolitical playbooks

Context:

- The article analyzes the **changing approaches to foreign policy** by two emerging global powers - India and China especially in the context of the West Asian region.

Background:

- The tectonic geopolitical shifts of 2020, from deteriorating U.S.-China ties, followed by the Ladakh crisis, is forcing a drastic change in the geopolitical strategy of both India and China, and, by association, global security architectures as well.

West Asian region:

- Traditionally three nations **Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel have been the major powers of the region.**
- The region has been characterized by its **multi-layered conflicts and political fissures** with the general tensions between the Gulf states and Iran being the most visible geopolitical factor at play.
- The region has witnessed multiple wars and conflicts.

- E.g.: the ongoing [Syrian](#) and Yemen war.
- Recently major shifts have taken place in West Asia.
 - First, there seems to be a growing perception in the Gulf that the American security safety net is not absolute, and they need to invest more in others.
 - Second, the **Gulf economies such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE have been attempting a shift away from their reliance on the petrodollar** and reform their economic systems.
 - **Israel's recent peace accords with the UAE and Bahrain** hold immense potential in ensuring a more stable Gulf region.

Details:

India's Approach:

- India's outreach to West Asia sharpened since 2014 with heightened economic and political preference from the government.

Economic angle:

- India has been looking to **attract investments from the oil-rich Gulf nations** especially UAE and Saudi Arabia who themselves are looking for investment alternatives away from the West. India with its large and growing economy and large population makes it an attractive investment destination.
- There have been multiple billion-dollar investments on Indian shores by entities from Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

Strategic shift in relations with Israel:

- Unlike previously, wherein India seemed reluctant to deepen its bilateral relationship with Israel, in a welcome departure, India's engagements with Israel have also moved steadily forward.
- **India-Israel relations have diversified** with cooperation and collaboration in the areas of defence technology, agriculture, water engineering, biotechnology, etc.

Declining India-Iran engagement:

- One area of concern for India in its West Asian outreach has been its relations with Iran.
- The **U.S. sanctions on Iran** and India's increasing alignment with the U.S. have resulted in a lower degree of India-Iran engagements.
- However, there has been no complete shut off of relations given India's investments in Iran ([Chabahar port](#)).

China's approach:

- Given the increasingly isolationist approach being employed by the U.S. and its perceived retreat from the West Asian region, China, being second only to the U.S. in both economic and military terms today has been increasing its presence in the region.

Military outreach:

- China supplied to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Chinese Wing Loong drones in 2016 - a copy of U.S.'s armed MQ-9 'Reaper' drone that the U.S. had refused to sell.

Economic muscle:

- With **China being one of the largest importers of crude**, the oil-rich Gulf economies view China as a major market for their produce.
- Taking advantage of U.S. President Donald Trump's abandonment of the Iran nuclear deal, China has been strengthening its relationship with Iran. **Iran and China recently signed a 25-year Cooperation Program or Comprehensive Strategic Partnership** pegged at around \$400 billion.
- China with its [Belt and Road Initiative](#) and high investment potential has emerged as a major economic power in the region.

More proactive role:

- Unhappy with its previous passive role, China has been proactive in the region. It along with Iran recently suggested the development of a “new forum” to address the region's tensions — an alternative to the West-led ecosystems that have prevailed for decades.

Comparison of India and China's approach:

Similarities:

- Both India and China have employed similar versions of ‘**non-alignment**’ thinking in West Asia without stepping into the entanglements of the region's multi-layered conflicts and political fissures.

Contrasts:

- Unlike **India which has adopted a more or less balanced approach with its outreach to the three powers of the region - Saudi Arabia, Israel and Iran**, China seems to be backing Iran more aggressively.

Conclusion:

- The **theory of interests superseding ideology in foreign policy has been a predominant theme in current times.**
- The foreign policy approach to the West Asian region is an apt example of this metamorphosing approach towards the international arena by India and China.

Category: HEALTH

1. The many lessons from COVID-19

Context:

- The article analyzes the impact of COVID-19 in India and suggests certain measures to ensure a more robust healthcare sector in India.

Background:

Impact on women:

- In India, the pandemic has had a **differential impact on women.**
 - The pandemic resulted in **decreased access to contraceptive services and safe abortions.** As per a recent modelling study, because of the reduction in coverage of essential services,

the prevalence of wasting in children could increase by 10% to 50%, there could also be 60% more maternal deaths. The progress made in maternal mortality, infant mortality, institutional births and replacement level fertility could be reversed.

- There have been reports of an increase in **domestic violence incidents** in India. The accessibility of domestic violence-affected women to support systems have also decreased.
- Given that **more women than men work in the informal economy** and the fact that the informal economy was the most affected segment during the COVID-related lockdown, **many women have lost their work and livelihoods**. This has reduced their incomes by large proportions and could push them into poverty.

Impact on children:

- COVID-19 has also **disrupted the education system**. It has also adversely **affected access to nutritious food** as a huge number of children depend on school meals.
- Over 70% of countries reported partial or complete **disruption of immunisation services**.

Disrupted health services:

- Critical health services of diagnosis and treatment of non-communicable diseases, cancer diagnosis and treatment, family planning, contraception, antenatal care, malaria and [TB](#) case detection, treatment facility-based births, and urgent blood transfusions, as well as emergency surgery, have been disrupted.

Suggestions:

- The COVID-19 experience has brought to light many deficiencies in our approach to the healthcare sector and going forward the following aspects could help ensure a more robust and effective response to future challenges.

Gender-specific responses:

- Given the differential impact on women, there should be an increased emphasis on gender analysis and **gender-responsive public health policies**.

Evidence-based policies:

- Given the lack of availability of data that are disaggregated by sex and age and the lack of accurate data on violence against women and children, states should focus on **collecting data disaggregated by sex and analyse it to formulate appropriate responses**.

Financial protection:

- Apart from ensuring the availability of essential medical services, there needs to also be a focus on ensuring financial protection with respect to accessing health services. This could be in the form of either a **health coverage scheme, like [Ayushman Bharat](#)**, or through private health insurance.
 - Out-of-pocket payments cause about 100 million to fall into extreme poverty every year, and 800 million globally spend more than 10% of their household budget on healthcare.

Digital healthcare:

- Digital technology can help ensure increased access to healthcare services in the form of telemedicine. This could also help in collecting, using and sharing data, enabling local, contextualised decision-making.

- Platforms like ECHO have been used in many states to train healthcare workers and the government's **e-Sanjeevani platform** is enabling telemedicine appointments.

For more information on the benefits of digital healthcare, refer to:

[CNA dated Aug 16, 2020: Digital health mission will liberate citizens](#)

Role for the private sector:

- The private sector should also be encouraged to play a bigger role in the health sector given the fact that they are already playing a very big role in technology.
- However, the government should continue its participation and even enhance its participation given the **basically public good nature of health services**.

Countering infodemics:

- False or misleading information leading to harmful behaviours, and mistrust in governments and the public health response have had a negative impact on the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The fear, stigma and discrimination circulated on social media must be **countered by health literacy**.
- The tech companies must play a bigger role in infodemic management through a more proactive role in managing the spread of false news. Additionally, the **state should provide timely advices to counteract the spread of false news**.

Emphasis on nutrition:

- There is the need to further integrate social protection systems, food systems and health systems in order to have a positive impact on **nutrition as a major component of preventive healthcare**.
- The existing social protection systems need to be **expanded to protect the most vulnerable population groups to ensure nutritional security**.

More integrated approach to health:

- The risk factors and the social and environmental determinants of health, such as the quality of water and air need greater consideration. All arms of the government must look at the impact of their policies on health.

Empowering the health workers:

- Recognizing the critical role played by the health workers at the forefront of the battle against the pandemic, the state policy must focus on empowering frontline health workers. There should be **higher investments in training and mentoring and equipping them with better resources**.

Higher public investments in health:

- India needs to invest more in public health institutions and primary healthcare, given that countries that have previously invested in primary healthcare have been reaping the benefits of a healthier population.

Emphasis on science:

- There needs to be greater emphasis on science and research and development given the successful examples of the global collaboration between scientists to take forward advances in knowledge and its role in informing mankind's response to the pandemic.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Kumki Elephant

- Kumki is a term used in India for trained captive Asian elephants used in operations to trap wild elephants.
- They are sometimes used to rescue or to provide medical treatment to an injured or trapped wild elephant.
- More specifically, the term "Kumki" is applied to trained female elephants used as decoys.
- Kumkis are used for capturing, calming and herding wild elephants or to lead wild elephants away in conflict situations.
- The Kumkis are trained to scare away wild pachyderms into the forest, either by using their trunk or tusks.

Note:

- Karnataka has the largest elephant population in the country.
- In Karnataka, elephants in conflict with humans are captured and confined.

G. Tidbits

1. 'Responsible' fuel pricing needed: PM

What's in News?

Prime Minister's speech at the inaugural session of the India Energy Forum.

Details:

- The PM opined that global energy producers must pursue more responsible pricing policies.
- He said that India needs affordable and reliable energy sources.
- He also highlighted the government's ambition to 'ensure energy justice'.
- The PM listed seven key drivers of change on India's energy map:
 1. Accelerating efforts towards a gas-based economy.
 2. Cleaner use of fossil fuels, particularly petroleum and coal.
 3. Greater reliance on domestic sources to drive biofuel.
 4. Achieving the renewable energy target of 450 GW by 2030.
 5. Increasing the contribution of electricity to decarbonise mobility.
 6. Moving into emerging fuels, including hydrogen.
 7. Digital innovation across all energy systems.
- It was highlighted that the 2019 exploration and licencing policy has shifted the focus from revenue to production maximisation.
- The PM also expressed plans to raise India's refining capacity from about 250 million metric tonnes (MMT) a year to 400 MMT by 2025.

2. 'India is much safer against tsunami threat'

What's in News?

The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) director has asserted that India is much safer against the threat of tsunamis than it was in 2004, owing to the state-of-the-art tsunami early warning system established in INCOIS.

- Currently, large under sea earthquakes can be detected in real-time and provide a tsunami warning in 10-20 minutes after the earthquake occurrence.
- However, he warned that the best of warning systems could fail, if communities are not prepared, if they do not understand the official and natural warning signs of a tsunami, and appropriate and timely response is not taken.
- He said that the focus in recent times has been on:
 - Enhancing community awareness and response through several capacity-building activities.
 - Biennial Indian Ocean-wide tsunami drills.
 - Piloting of the UNESCO-IOC Tsunami Ready initiative to provide a structured framework to build and measure capacities of coastal communities to respond effectively to tsunamis, through 11 important indicators.

Read more on the Tsunami Ready program in [PIB dated Aug 6, 2020](#).

3. Polio networks helped curb COVID-19: WHO

What's in News?

In a release issued by the WHO, South East Asia Region, it has been indicated that polio networks could play a critical role in COVID-19 vaccination rollout.

- The polio-network has been effectively used in the south-east Asia region during the pandemic.
- Polio networks contain a vast knowledge on vaccination, tools and strategies tailored to reach the unreached and the most vulnerable.
- Uttar Pradesh, the most populous state in India, used polio micro-plans to help identify over two lakh people with COVID-19 symptoms. These persons were then followed-up and tested for [COVID-19](#).

4. Women at the heart of recovery

- The government has announced economic reforms and a stimulus package to help revive economic growth in the post COVID scenario.
- The article argues that this scenario **offers India an opportunity to build climate resilience and address gender equality issues**.
 - According to the India Voluntary National Review 2020, female labour force participation rate for the 15-59 age group is showing a declining trend and stands at 25.3%. This is one of the lowest rates in the world. The [International Monetary Fund](#) estimates that equal participation of women in the workforce will increase India's GDP by 27%.
 - Climate change has had a negative impact on humans more so on the vulnerable sections of the society, due to stressed agriculture, food insecurity and shrinking water resources.

- The article argues that **putting women at the heart of the economic recovery and ensuring an environmentally sustainable approach will make the process faster, just, inclusive and also sustainable.**

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Assumption Island:

1. It is one of the islands constituting the Seychelles archipelago.
2. It is located to the north of Madagascar.
3. India has signed an agreement to develop transport infrastructure facilities on the Island.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Assumption Island is one of the islands constituting the Seychelles archipelago.
- It is located to the north of Madagascar.
- India has signed an agreement with Seychelles to jointly develop transport infrastructure facilities on the Island.

Q2. India holds ministerial level '2+2' Dialogue with which of the following countries?

1. The U.S.A.
2. Japan
3. China
4. Australia

Options:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- India holds ministerial-level '2+2' Dialogue with the U.S.A and Japan.
- It holds such talks with Australia, at the foreign secretary and defence secretary level.

Q3. Arrange the following military communication agreements between India and the US in chronological order in which they were signed:

1. General Security of Military Information Agreement
2. Industrial Security Annex
3. Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement
4. Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement

Options:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) – GSOMIA was signed in 2002.
- The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) was signed in 2016.
- The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018.
- An extension to the GSOMIA, the Industrial Security Annex (ISA), was signed at the last 2+2 dialogue (2019).

Q4. Arrange the following Elephant Reserves from North to South:

1. Dihing-Patkai Elephant Reserve
2. Dandeli Elephant Reserve
3. Anamalai Elephant Reserve
4. Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve

Choose the correct option:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Dihing-Patkai Elephant Reserve – Assam
- Mayurbhanj Elephant Reserve – Odisha
- Dandeli Elephant Reserve – Karnataka
- Anamalai Elephant Reserve – Tamil Nadu

1. 'Strategic autonomy' should not be understood as 'non-alignment'. Issue-based alignment may be a necessary component in contemporary times. Analyze in the backdrop of the evolving geopolitical situation for India. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS Paper 2/International Relations)
2. Putting women at the heart of the post-COVID economic recovery and ensuring an environmentally sustainable approach will make the process faster, just, inclusive and also sustainable. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words)(GS Paper 3/Economy)