

30 Oct 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Yashvardhan likely to be next CIC

Context:

Former diplomat and Central Information Commissioner Yashvardhan Kumar Sinha is tipped to be appointed the next Chief Information Commissioner (CIC).

Background - Issues:

- The Central Information Commission consists of a chief and up to 10 commissioners.
 - It has been headless twice this year and has not functioned at full strength for almost four years.
- At present, it has only five commissioners, leading to a backlog of 37,000 pending cases.
- In a February 2019 order, the Supreme Court had directed that appointments be made in a transparent and timely manner.
 - The SC directed the government to put up all necessary information on its website, including particulars of the applicants and the composition of the search committee which shortlists candidates.
 - The DoPT has not made this information public.

Read more about the [Central Information Commission](#).

Appointment of the Chief Information Commissioner:

- The commissioners are appointed by the President of India on the recommendation of a committee.
- As per the RTI Act, the appointment of commissioners in the Central Information Commission is recommended by a committee comprising the prime minister (chairperson), a cabinet minister and the leader of the single largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. What is behind the spat between Turkey and France?

Context:

Rift between France and Turkey - two NATO members has widened.

Background:

- Turkey and France have clashed over a number of geopolitical issues in recent years.
- Recently, a teacher in a suburb of Paris was beheaded by an 18-year-old Chechen after he showed his students caricatures of the Prophet.
- Following the murder, the French government started an operation to crackdown on Islamist organisations.
- President of Turkey - Recep Tayyip Erdogan launched a personal attack on his French counterpart Emmanuel Macron following the latter's call for reforming Islam.
- Turkey's Erdogan called for a boycott of French goods and questioned Emmanuel Macron's sanity, after the latter declared that "Islam is a religion that is in crisis today all over the world".
- France recalled its Ambassador from Turkey, for the first time.
- While France (the EU's most powerful military) is trying to assert itself under Mr. Macron, Mr. Erdogan's neo-Ottoman foreign policy is ready to pick up fights wherever it sees an opening.

Details:

- The trigger for the latest clash was the French government's support for Charlie Hebdo, the satirical magazine to republish the cartoons.
 - Charlie Hebdo's office was attacked by al-Qaeda-linked jihadists in January 2015 over its publication of a set of caricatures of Prophet Muhammed.

- Ankara, under Mr. Erdogan's AK Party, has projected itself as a defender of (selective) Muslim causes worldwide, and had slammed Mr. Macron earlier over his push to reform Islam in France.
- It added fuel to the raging tensions between France and Turkey.

Macron's reform plan?

- Macron outlined the substance of a long-awaited law which his government is planning to introduce to regulate the practice of Islam in France.
 - While unveiling the essence of the Bill, the President said the law was being brought in to fight "Islamist separatism", which he opined often results in the creation of a counter-society.
 - He said that it will crackdown on foreign influence in French Muslim communities and allow the government to track funding for mosques from overseas.
 - It was said that the government will create a certificate programme for the imams and ban homeschooling.
- Also, he had defended blasphemy, saying that the right to caricature is an essential part of being French.

Geopolitical angle:

- There is a larger geopolitical context to the rising tensions between Turkey and France.
- As Turkey is trying to expand its influence to the erstwhile Ottoman territories, France has stood in its way.
- In Libya, where Turkey is backing the Tripoli-based government, France has supported the Tobruk-based parallel government and the military campaign of the renegade General Khalifa Haftar against Tripoli.
- In the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey has launched a gas exploration mission, clashing with Greece and Cyprus, while France has stood in support of the fellow EU members and even sent French warships to the region.
- In the [Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict](#), Turkey offered unconditional support to the Azeri military offensive, while Mr. Macron slammed Ankara's intervention.
- In all these cases, France and Turkey emerged as two opposing poles in the West and the East, respectively.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Centre sets up commission to tackle NCR pollution

Context:

The Centre has constituted the Commission for Air Quality Management in the National Capital Region and adjoining areas.

Details:

- It was brought in via an ordinance. However, the commission awaits a formal scrutiny by the Supreme Court before it can be brought into effect.
- It is a permanent body that replaces the 22-year-old Environmental Pollution Prevention and Control Authority (EPCA).

- Encompassing Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, the body assumes several powers:
 - To coordinate action among States.
 - Levy fines ranging up to ₹1 crore or five years in prison to address air pollution.

Composition of the commission:

- The panel will have at least six permanent members.
- It will be headed by a former or incumbent Secretary to the Central government, or a Chief Secretary to a State government.
- It will have members from Ministries as well as representatives from States.
- The [Central Pollution Control Board](#) and its State branches have the powers to implement provisions of the Environment (Protection) Act for air, water and land pollution. In case of dispute or a clash of jurisdictions, the commission's writ will prevail specific to matters concerning air pollution.

Read more on this topic covered in the [27th October 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Category: ECONOMY

1. Centre relaxes Air India sale terms yet again

Context:

The Centre has revised the bidding parameters for 100% stake sale in Air India.

Details:

- The centre has allowed private players to quote an enterprise value (EV) for the airline.
- According to the latest development, enterprise value shall mean the combined value of debt and equity of AI as assessed by the bidder in its financial bid.
 - The only change is that there is no pre-determined debt.
 - This, however, would not mean that Air India sale will be debt-free. It means that the debt will be determined in the market.
- The government has extended the deadline multiple times due to lack of interest from prospective buyers.
 - This is the government's third effort to garner the interest of the buyers.
- Bidders will be given seven days to pose queries on the new bidding parameters after which they can submit their bids.

Read more about [Air India - Beginning, Journey & Current Crisis](#)

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The India-U.S. defence partnership is deepening

Context:

- The article analyzes the evolving bilateral relationship between India and the U.S. over the years, particularly in the domain of defence partnership.

Background:

The 2+2 Dialogue in Delhi:

- The India-United States defence partnership received a major boost recently with the visit of the U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and U.S. Defence Secretary Mark Esper for the **third round of the 2+2 ministerial dialogue**.
- Given that most ministerial engagements and even bilateral summits are taking place virtually due to travel restrictions, the fact that the U.S. Secretary of State and U.S. Defence Secretary travelled to India for the summit a week before the U.S. goes to the polls is an indication of the defence partnership between the two democracies having come of age.

History of the defence partnership:

Kicklighter proposals:

- India-U.S. defence partnership began with the end of the Cold War, through the **1991 Kicklighter proposals** (Lt. Gen. Claude Kicklighter was the Army commander at the U.S. Pacific Command) which suggested the establishment of contacts between the three Services to promote exchanges and explore areas of cooperation.
- An Agreed **Minute on Defence Cooperation** was concluded in 1995 instituting a dialogue at the Defence Secretary level together with the setting up of a **Technology Group**.

Nuclear issue:

- The nuclear issue continued to cast a shadow on the relationship between the two countries. The U.S. imposed a slew of economic sanctions and led an international condemnation campaign against India after India conducted its nuclear tests in 1998.

Defence relationship framework:

- After extensive talks, sanctions were gradually lifted and **in 2005, a 10-year Framework for Defence Relationship was established, followed by a Joint Declaration on Defence Cooperation in 2013**. The Framework Agreement was renewed in 2015 for another decade.
 - The Defence Relationship Framework laid out an institutional mechanism for areas of cooperation including joint exercises, intelligence exchanges, joint training for multinational operations including disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, technology transfer and a sharing of non-proliferation best practices.

Decisive shift:

- Breaking away from the outdated notion of India's strategic autonomy being impacted by its closer alignment with the U.S., the biggest push to the India-US relationship has come from the current government. This move has been reciprocated by the following U.S. measures.

- A **Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region** was announced in **2015**.
- The **India-U.S. Strategic and Commercial Dialogue** was elevated to the status of the **2+2 dialogue in 2018**, reflecting the ‘Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership’ between the two countries.
- The **U.S. categorised India as “a Major Defence Partner” in 2016** and formalised it through the National Defense Authorisation Act (2017). This is a position unique to India given that such categorization was mostly limited to its NATO allies and a few other nations.

Defence contracts:

- From less than \$400 million of defence acquisitions till 2005, the U.S. has since signed **defence contracts worth \$18 billion with India**. This marks a major shift given that India had been traditionally almost completely dependent on Russia for defence products.
 - As per reports published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), India was the world’s second-largest arms importer during the period 2015-19, with Russia being the largest supplier though Russia’s share of the Indian weapons market declined from 72% to 56%. Israel, the U.S. and France have substantial arms exports to India.
 - India has imported **Apache, Chinook and MH 60 'Romeo' helicopters and P8I maritime aircraft from the US**. The US could also sell **Predator, Reaper Armed Drones to India** amid rising tensions with China.
- In 2018, India was placed in **Category I of the Strategic Trade Authorisation, easing exports of sensitive technologies**.
- India and the US have also decided to deepen defence and security cooperation by collaborating on the **co-development and production of advanced military systems** along with other aspects like defence technology transfer.
 - The **Defence Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI)** was formed in 2012 between the US and India, to enhance the bilateral relations in defence by venturing into the field of advanced defence research and development and manufacturing. The aim was to strengthen the US and India’s defence industrial base by moving away from the traditional “buyer-seller” dynamic toward a more collaborative approach.

Joint defence exercises:

- Joint military exercises with the U.S. have expanded, both in scale and complexity over the years.
 - **Ex Yudhabhayas and Ex Vajra Prahar** are joint military exercises.
 - **Ex Cope India** is a joint Airforce exercise.
 - **Ex Malabar** is a joint navy exercise which also involves Japan (Australia has been invited for Malabar 2020).
 - **Tiger Triumph is a bilateral tri-service amphibious military exercise** involving the armed forces of India and the United States. It is the first tri-service military exercise between the two countries.
 - India has previously only held tri-service exercises with Russia.

Foundational agreements:

- The **General Security Of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA)**, relating to the security of each other’s military information was signed in 2002.
- In 2016, **Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)** relating to the exchange of logistics support had been concluded, followed by **Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA)** in 2018 permitting encryption standards of communication systems.
- The recent signing of the **Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA)** providing for the sharing of geospatial data is the last of the foundational agreements.

Cooperation in multilateral forums:

- India and the US are part of the **Quad grouping** along with Australia and Japan.
- India has been invited for the first time to attend the **Five Eyes** (a signals intelligence grouping set up in 1941 consisting of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the U.S.) meeting.
- The U.S. has aided India's entry into **export control regimes** (Australia Group, Missile Technology Control Regime and **Wassenaar Arrangement**).

Factors which have helped the strengthening of India-US relationship:

Landmark nuclear deal:

- The 2008 India-U.S. civil nuclear deal marks a watershed moment in the bilateral relationship. It helped remove the biggest legacy obstacle between the two countries and marked a decisive shift from being “estranged democracies” to “natural allies”.

Economic aspects:

- India has been managing impressive annual GDP growth rates over the years. The progressive opening up of the Indian economy which boasts of a large consumer market is a big incentive for a country like the U.S. for lucrative trade deals. Notably, the U.S. market also accounts for a large proportion of India's services exports.
 - **Bilateral trade in goods and services** was \$20 billion in 2000 and exceeded \$140 billion in 2018.

Indian diaspora in the U.S.:

- The **four million-strong Indian diaspora** in the U.S and its substantial political representation has had a positive role in the strengthening of ties between India and the U.S.

Bipartisan consensus:

- A bipartisan political consensus supporting the steady growth in India-U.S. ties in both India and the U.S. has been a critical supporting factor for the relationship. There has been a consistent deepening of ties over the years irrespective of which party has been in power either in the U.S. or India.

Converging interests:

- The current geopolitical context with China exhibiting increasing assertiveness in the region and globally, makes China the biggest threat not just for India but also the U.S.
- The **common threat perception from China** has been a major factor which has facilitated greater cooperation between the two countries.

Conclusion:

- The defence ties between the two countries have come of age. Even though there continues to be a certain divergence of interests in some areas, there seem to be higher potential benefits of cooperation and collaboration between the two countries.
- Working together would require **mutual respect and trust while accepting differences**.
- The policy debate in India should not get driven by ideologies but by India's immediate as well as long term national interest. The policy objective has to enhance India's strategic space and capability.

1. Less pollution, more soil fertility

Context:

- Stubble burning in the north Indian states.

Background:

Stubble burning:

- Stubble burning refers to the practice of farmers setting fire to plant debris that remains in farms after harvest.

Green revolution and stubble burning:

- The **origin of stubble burning can be traced to the advent of the [Green Revolution](#)**.
 - **Mechanised harvesting**, a feature of the Green Revolution, utilised the **combined harvesting technique which left behind substantial plant debris after harvest**. The combined harvesting technique left behind one-foot-tall stalks. This prompted stubble burning as a low-cost and speedy solution to get rid of the plant debris just in time for the next crop sowing.
 - The Green Revolution increased greatly rice and wheat production, which simultaneously increased stubble post-harvest.

For more on [stubble burning](#), its causes, effects, and solutions, click on the linked article.

Concerns:

Health impact:

- Stubble burning releases **harmful gases including nitrogen oxide and carbon monoxide into the atmosphere**. In recent years, this practice has created vast smoke blankets across the Indo-Gangetic Plain, including Delhi.
- This has **exposed millions of people to air pollution**.
 - As per a TERI (The Energy and Resources Institute) report, in 2019 the air pollution in New Delhi and other parts of north India was 20 times higher than the safe threshold level as prescribed by the [World Health Organization](#).

Effect on soil fertility:

- Stubble burning has a **negative impact on soil fertility by destroying organic fertilizers, killing critical soil microbes and reducing groundwater levels**.

Efforts taken to tackle stubble burning:

- In 2013, stubble burning was banned by the Punjab state government.

- **In 2015, the National Green Tribunal imposed a ban on stubble burning in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab.** The governments were directed to assist farmers by ensuring the availability of equipment like happy seeders and rotavator to the farmers.
- Stubble burning has been made an **offence under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code and the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act of 1981.**
- Recently, in **Aditya Dubey v. Union of India** case, the Supreme Court appointed a one-man committee to monitor and provide steps to prevent stubble burning activities in Punjab, Haryana and U.P.
- The Union government has brought out an ordinance to set up a permanent commission for air quality management.

Way forward:

Deterring violators:

- There needs to be a robust system in place to **detect and notify authorities about stubble burning.** Suitable action against violators could deter other farmers.

Supporting farmers:

- The administration should support the farmers through setting up of **Custom Hiring Centres** which will facilitate farmers to remove stubble by providing them with machinery such as the **happy seeder, rotavator, paddy straw chopper, etc.** on rent.

Look for alternatives:

PUSA decomposer:

- An innovative method called the **PUSA Decomposer, developed at the Indian Agricultural Research Institute, Pusa,** is being tested by the Union government.
 - The PUSA Decomposer is a set of four tablets made by extracting fungi strains that help the **paddy straw to decompose at a much faster rate** than usual, giving farmers the option to shred the straw, spray a solution containing the fungal strains, and **mix it with the soil for decomposition.**
- This method has the potential to both **reduce air pollution and increase soil fertility and consequently help improve agricultural productivity.**

Using stubble as stock for biofuels:

- Developing **stubble based biofuel generating methods** could incentivize the farmers to avoid stubble burning by attaching economic value to the stubble.
- Apart from helping avoid stubble burning, this could also provide an avenue to **increase the incomes of farmers, incentivize biofuel based units in rural areas and also help reduce India's import dependency of crude oil.**

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. CM launches app for registration of pollution-related complaints

What's in News?

The Chief Minister of Delhi has launched the “Green Delhi” app.

- The app has been launched to enable every citizen to participate in the 'Yuddh, Pradushan Ke Viruddh' (fight against pollution) campaign.
- The app will involve citizen participation and ensure timely action in the government's fight against pollution.
- It enables citizens to register complaints, report pollution sources and violations of anti-pollution norms.
- Constant monitoring will be done at the Delhi government's Green War Room. 70 Green Marshals will be deployed for monitoring of the complaints.
- Also, timelines have been specified for the resolution of complaints.

2. Lowest core sector shrinking since March

What's in News?

India's eight core industry sectors shrank just 0.8% in September 2020 on a year-on-year basis, recording their lowest contraction since March 2020.

Read more about the [Index of Industrial Production](#).

3. India upset by Kashmir depiction on Saudi note

What's in News?

India has described the map of Kashmir in a new currency note of Saudi Arabia as a “gross misrepresentation” of sovereign territory.

- The 20 riyal note was printed by the Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority to celebrate the Saudi presidency of the G20.
- The map shows Kashmir as a separate entity between India and Pakistan.
- Delhi has taken up the issue at the diplomatic level with Riyadh.

4. 3 killed in French church attack

What's in News?

A knife-wielding attacker shouting “Allahu Akbar” beheaded a woman and killed two other people at a church in the French city of Nice.

- The attack was similar to the beheading of a teacher in Paris who had used cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed in a civics class.

- The suspected knife attacker was shot by police while being detained.
- France has raised the security alert for the French territory to the highest level after the knife attack.

5. Gaps in learning

- The **Annual Status of Education Report 2020** notes the **severe disruption for schools** caused by the COVID-19 pandemic more so for students in rural areas. The ASER 2020 survey has come up with some striking findings.
 - There has been a **shift in enrolments from private schools to government institutions**, of about five percentage points over 2018, ranging from class one to higher secondary levels.
 - Due to the suspension of physical classes since the lockdown in March, there has been a **marked rise in students not being enrolled**, either because they dropped out, or because it was not possible to get admitted.
 - The survey highlights a **stark digital divide**. The survey found 43.6% of students in government schools without access to a smartphone, while 67.3% of those who received learning materials in these institutions got them over WhatsApp, underscoring the role played by gadgets and connectivity.
- The ASER survey provides data that could facilitate suitable intervention in the education system.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of these countries border the Red Sea?

1. Yemen
2. Jordan
3. Saudi Arabia
4. Egypt
5. Sudan

Choose the correct options:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti border the Red Sea.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. The excess of the government's total expenditure over its total non-borrowed receipts is called the fiscal deficit.
2. The primary deficit is the fiscal deficit minus interest payments.

3. The FRBM Act suggests bringing the fiscal deficit down to about 4 percent of the GDP as the ideal target for India.

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

- 1 only
- 1 and 3 only
- 3 only
- 2 only

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

- When the government's non-borrowed receipts fall short of its entire expenditure, it has to borrow money from the public to meet the shortfall.
- The excess of the government's total expenditure over its total non-borrowed receipts is called the fiscal deficit.
- The primary deficit is the fiscal deficit minus interest payments. It tells how much of the government's borrowings are going towards meeting expenses other than interest payments.
- The FRBM Act suggests that bringing the fiscal deficit down to about 3 percent of the GDP is the ideal target for India.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to River Mahanadi:

1. It originates in Odisha.
2. It is an east-flowing river draining into the Bay of Bengal.
3. The Hirakud dam is built across this river.

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

- 1 and 2 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1, 2 and 3
- 3 only

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The river Mahanadi originates in Chhattisgarh.
- It is an east-flowing river draining into the Bay of Bengal.
- The Hirakud dam is built across the river Mahanadi.

Q4. Arrange the eight Core Industries in decreasing order of their weightage in the Index of Industrial Production:

1. Electricity
2. Fertilizers

3. Natural Gas
4. Crude oil
5. Steel

Choose the correct option:

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The eight core sector industries include coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, fertilizer, steel, cement and electricity.
- Eight Core Industries in decreasing order of their weightage in the Index of Industrial Production: Refinery Products> Electricity> Steel> Coal> Crude Oil> Natural Gas> Cement> Fertilizers.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Analyze the deepening bilateral relationship between India and the U.S. over the years, particularly in the domain of defence partnership and discuss the factors which are driving this partnership forward. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS Paper 2/International Relations)
2. Discuss the factors which have contributed to the problem of stubble burning in North Indian states and the associated concerns. Also suggest what measures can be taken to address the stubble burning challenge in India. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS Paper 3/Environment and Ecology)

