

09 Nov 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. A-G stands firm in plea against Jagan Reddy

Context:

Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal has said it is open to the Supreme Court to initiate suo motu contempt proceedings against Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy for his letter to the Chief Justice of India containing allegations against sitting Supreme Court judge N.V. Ramana.

This topic has been covered in the [3rd November 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Next U.S. govt. must make up for past mistakes: Iran

Context:

Following Joe Biden's victory in the presidential elections in the U.S, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said that the next U.S. administration has an opportunity to compensate for its previous mistakes.

Background:

- U.S. President Donald Trump had applied a maximum pressure policy and crippling sanctions against Iran since the 2018 withdrawal from a landmark nuclear agreement with Tehran.
 - It is officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).
 - It was signed between Iran and the P5, plus Germany and the EU in 2015. P5 is the 5 permanent members of the [UNSC](#) (US, China, France, Russia, and the UK).
- The reimposed sanctions targeted Iran's vital oil industry and banking ties, among other sectors.

Details:

- During his campaign, Mr. Biden said that he plans to embark on a credible path to return to diplomacy with Iran.
- He also raised the possibility of returning to the 2015 nuclear deal, negotiated when he was vice president under Barack Obama.

2. Biden may relax curbs on H-1B, job-based visas

Context:

Mr. Biden – the U.S president-elect is expected to reverse the move of the outgoing Trump administration to revoke work permits to the spouses of H-1B visas, which had adversely impacted a large number of Indian families in the U.S.

Read more about some important U.S Visas covered in the [9th February 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- The policy document issued by the Biden campaign said that Indian-Americans know first-hand the strength and resilience that immigrants bring to the U.S. - as a largely immigrant community, but in some cases with American roots reaching back generations.
- It said that he would work towards passing legislative immigration reform with a priority on keeping families together by providing a roadmap to citizenship for nearly 11 million undocumented immigrants (this includes more than 500,000 from India).
- It also said that he would increase the number of visas offered for permanent, work-based immigration based on macroeconomic conditions and exempt from any cap recent graduates of Ph.D. programmes in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) fields.

Also read the Editorial “Biden, India and comfort in the old normal” covered in [7th November 2020 CNA](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Note ban curbed black money: PM

Context:

On the fourth anniversary of demonetisation, Prime Minister said that the move helped in reducing black money, increase tax compliance and formalisation of the economy.

- “Demonetisation has helped reduce black money, increase tax compliance and formalisation and given a boost to transparency. These outcomes have been greatly beneficial towards national progress,” the PM said.

Background:

- On November 8, 2016, the PM had announced the government’s decision to ban all currency notes of ₹500 and ₹1,000 from midnight.

Read more on [Demonetisation – its Pros and Cons](#).

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. No relief for Delhi from ‘severe’ air quality

Context:

Air quality in New Delhi remained in the ‘severe’ category for the fourth consecutive day.

Issues:

- Farm fires continue to burn in neighbouring states, contributing to 29% of the total air pollution in the National Capital Region.
- System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting And Research (SAFAR) said the situation was unlikely to improve unless there was a drastic reduction in stubble fire counts.

Read more about [Stubble Burning, System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting And Research \(SAFAR\)](#).

2. Experts want more U.S. action on climate

Context:

While the United States President-elect, Joseph Biden has committed to getting the country back into the 2015 [Paris Climate Change Treaty](#), experts in India say the U.S. ought to be doing more.

Background:

The U.S. formally left the Treaty on November 2 after a four-year withdrawal period.

This topic has been covered in the [5th November 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- Several developed countries and regions including the United Kingdom, Japan, and the EU have committed to achieving 'net zero emissions' by 2050.
- China, too, has committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2060 with [greenhouse gas](#) levels peaking by 2030.
- India has consistently maintained that it was doing more than its fair share towards achieving Paris targets.
 - India's emission share in the world is only 6%.
 - India is making efforts towards increasing the tree cover.
 - It has converted vehicles to BS-VI standards and reduced emissions.
 - It has also prepared a land restoration plan besides other actions.
- The U.S., despite being the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, is exceptional in not committing to a deadline.
 - Experts opine that Biden won in part because of climate voters.
 - He got significant donations from the climate community and young people turned out in unprecedented numbers to vote for him.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India and Biden

Context:

- The election of Joe Biden as the 46th US president.

Background:

- The **current Indian administration had invested considerably in the Trump administration.**
 - The Houston and Ahmedabad rallies with Mr. Trump indicated a virtual endorsement for his re-election.
 - The External Affairs Minister had refused a meeting with the Democrat-led House Foreign Affairs Committee.

- India's invitation to senior Trump officials, for "2+2" talks just before the U.S. elections, also indicated India's expectation of a Trump win.
- There are concerns that this could **antagonize the incoming administration and its India foreign policy.**

Details:

- The article analyzes what could be the potential impact of the change in U.S. presidency on the India-U.S. relations. **The change in U.S. presidency could be a mixed bag for the government.**

Positives for India:

Incoming President's previous stance:

- Biden has been a long-time supporter of the U.S.-India relationship.
- Given the incoming President's understanding of foreign policy and his previous role in strengthening India-U.S. relations during his tenure as the Vice-president, India could expect a favourable U.S. stance towards India.

Change in Trump-era policies:

- With the change in leadership, there could be moves to reverse some of the Trump-era policies.

Climate Deal:

- There could be the **US's return to the Paris climate accord.**
- This would serve well for India given **India's stance of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) in climate negotiations.** The return of the U.S. to the Paris accord would provide the much-needed impetus to climate action and this in itself would serve India's interest in that it continues to remain one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change.
- The U.S.'s return would also aid the provision of the financial resources and technology to developing countries like India as envisaged in the Paris Accord.

For related information, refer to:

[**CNA dated Nov 8, 2020: A race against the clock to keep the planet cool**](#)

Iran nuclear negotiations:

- There could be a **potential watering down of tensions between the U.S. and Iran given the chances of the U.S. returning back to nuclear negotiations with Iran.**
- This augurs well for India given that it would no longer be required to walk the tight rope and choose between the U.S. or Iran as during the Trump presidency. This would provide some **much-needed succour to the India-Iran bilateral relations which have been on the downturn lately.**
- This would allow India to deepen its cooperation with Iran without the fear of U.S. sanctions and help counter the increasing influence of China in Iran. This will also facilitate India's regional connectivity ambitions through projects such as the Chabahar port project and the construction of the Chabahar-Zahedan rail link.

For related information, refer to:

[**CNA dated July 14, 2020: Iran drops India from Chabahar rail project, cites funding delay**](#)

Afghan peace process:

- Though it is highly unlikely that Mr. Joe Biden would reverse the Afghan pullout process, it might be possible that he might ensure **a more measured exit**. This would be beneficial as it provides the Afghanistan government more time and U.S. support to adapt to the U.S. pullout.
- Given the potential **negative impact of U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan on India's security and its interests in Afghanistan and the region**, the longer presence of the U.S. also entails several positives for India.

Views on multilateralism:

- Biden's stated intention to re-energise the multilateral global order is in line with India's support for **global rule-based multilateralism**.

Trade relations:

- India could expect a **more favourable US trade policy towards itself as against the 'America first' policy under Mr. Trump**.

Leadership style:

- Biden's presidency promises a change in leadership style, with more process-driven decisions. India would benefit from policy consistency as there would not be sudden moves such as **Mr. Trump's withdrawal of India's GSP export status or the restrictions on H1B visas**.

Indian Diaspora:

- Indian immigrants into the U.S. stand to gain under the Biden presidency given the stated position of the democrats on the issue of **reform of H1B visas and green card policies**.
- The new president is expected to take a **more pro-immigration stand**.

Negatives for India:

Approach towards China:

- Though the new president is expected to maintain the pushback against China, **the overtly pro-India and anti-China approach under President Trump may not continue**. This may place India in a disadvantageous position vis-a-vis China in the ongoing border dispute in Ladakh.

Statements on India's internal matters:

- The previous statements of the President-elect on India's internal matters like the abrogation of [Article 370](#) in Jammu and Kashmir, the issue of human rights and the Citizenship (Amendment) Act threaten to impact India-U.S. relations.

Conclusion:

- The U.S. president may not take an anti-India stand due to the following reasons/factors:
 - **India enjoys bipartisan support in the U.S.** across both the Democratic and Republican parties.
 - The **active Indian diaspora** is a politically influential group and the new president who has received support from this community may not take anti-India stands.

- **China is a common threat** for both countries and **India is the U.S.'s major Asian partner and the U.S.'s strategic counter to China** and it cannot afford to sour its relation with a strategic partner like India.
- Given the **mutual benefits of defence partnership**, it is likely to continue even under the new presidency.
- While India should be prepared to hold its own in tough conversations on sensitive internal issues, India should also prepare to **adjust its responses to the U.S. administration**.
- International relations are always transactional and it does not matter which party/individual is in power unless and until there are mutual interests involved. The same holds true for the India-U.S. relationship.

2. 'Strategic comfort' with the Maldives

Context:

- The visit of the Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla to the Maldives.

Background:

India-Maldives bilateral ties:

People to people relations:

- India and the Maldives have had **bilateral relations for centuries**.
- Maldivian students attend educational institutions in India and Maldivian patients come to India for super-specialty healthcare, aided by a liberal visa-free regime extended by India. This has increased the people to people contact between the two countries.

Economic relations:

- Tourism is the mainstay of the Maldivian economy accounting for a major proportion of its economy. **Indian tourists account for a large share of tourist inflow into the Maldives.**

Humanitarian assistance:

- India has always offered emergency assistance to the Maldives.
 - In 1988, under **Operation Cactus**, India sent paratroopers and Navy vessels when armed mercenaries attempted a coup against President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom.
 - India offered **medical aid and essential goods to the Maldives** in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.
 - When the Maldives faced a **drinking water crisis**, India rushed fresh water supplies through the Indian Navy.
 - Considering the geographical limitations of Maldives, India has exempted the Maldives from export curbs on essential commodities during the ongoing pandemic. India has also **offered \$250 million aid to the Maldives apart from offering medical supplies.**

See-saw in India-Maldives relations:

- The robust bilateral relations between India and Maldives took a **downturn under the presidency of Abdulla Yameen**, under whom the Maldives increasingly tilted towards China and exhibited a negative bias against India and its interests.

- The **election of Ibrahim Solih as the Maldivian President has provided the much-needed impetus to India-Maldives bilateral relations**, especially on the economic front.
 - India has offered massive developmental funding for creating physical, social and community infrastructure in the Maldives.
 - The Solih government has propounded an **'India First' policy** from day one of assuming the office and has **proposed a balanced approach towards trilateral equations between India-Maldives-China.**

Concerns:

- There have been **'India Out' protests going on in the Maldives**, mainly headed by the Yameen camp. They are complaining against the Solih government's increasing reliance on Indian funding and the administration's decision to retain two India-gifted helicopters and their operational military personnel.
- Though India can take respite in the 'strategic comfort' of the 'India First' policy of the Solih government, India should be concerned about the 'India out' protests.
- The intra-party rumblings within the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) do not augur well for its prospects in the upcoming 2023 presidential polls.

Significance of the bilateral relation:

For India:

- The Maldives constitutes a major component of **India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy** given its proximity to India. India and Maldives are neighbours sharing a maritime border.
- The Maldives is also important for India for its **Indian Ocean region policy**. The Maldives could play a significant role in protecting **India's increasing geostrategic concerns in the shared seas**. Closer India-Maldives relations can help limit the growing influence of China in the Indian Ocean region.
- The increasing influence of radical Islam in the Maldives could pose a security threat for India in the coming years. **Engaging and supporting the Maldives in its fight against extremism could also help India.**

For the Maldives:

- **India contributes to maintaining security in the Maldives.** It has gifted defence equipment based on Maldives' requests.
- India has provided **extensive economic aid** and has participated in bilateral programmes for the development of infrastructure, health, telecommunications and labour resources.

For related information, refer to:

[CNA dated Aug 14, 2020: India announces \\$500 mn package for the Maldives](#)

- Given that **India is a major power in the Indian Ocean region**, Maldives would be served well to maintain a robust relationship with India.

Conclusion:

- India and Maldives must push for taking forward the multifaceted cooperation between the two nations to the next stage. This could **serve the mutual interests of both nations.**
- India should also work towards building bipartisan consensus in the Maldives for strengthening the bilateral relations.

1. COVID-19, climate and carbon neutrality

Context:

- The article written by former Union Minister for Environment, Jairam Ramesh argues for India to pursue the **carbon neutrality principle**.

Background:

Ill effects of ecological disequilibrium:

Epidemic diseases:

- The **COVID-19 pandemic reflects fundamental ecological disequilibrium**. Available scientific evidence points to the fact that the **loss of biodiversity and the ever-increasing human incursions into the natural world** could be contributing to the outbreak and spread of epidemic diseases.
- The high levels of air pollution have been found to exacerbate the health impact of COVID-19.

Negative impact on health:

- The environmental problems — such as **air pollution, water pollution, chemical contamination, deforestation, waste generation and accumulation, land degradation and excessive use of pesticides** — are having profound public health consequences for humans.
 - The **State of Global Air report** notes that air pollution contributed to 6.7 million annual deaths globally in 2019 while India faced 1.67 million deaths due to polluted air.
 - Ambient air pollution also aggravates respiratory and cardiovascular conditions including chronic bronchitis, lung cancer and asthma.

Climate Change:

- Climate change, the result of GHG emissions is leading to **uncertainties in the monsoon, the retreat of the Himalayan glaciers and the increase in mean sea levels and is also increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme events**.

Carbon neutrality:

- Given that the traditional approach of '**grow now, pay later**' model is not only unsustainable in the medium- to long-term but also dangerous to public health in the short term, there have been growing calls for more active measures.
- Rather than resorting to ad hoc techniques like **geo-engineering**, which itself is riddled with complications, there is the need for more **long term solutions like planning for carbon neutrality**.
- Carbon Neutrality is being proposed as a necessary measure in **global climate action**.
 - **Carbon neutrality refers to achieving net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by balancing carbon dioxide emissions with carbon absorption**.
 - Achieving carbon neutrality has two basic aims, reducing or simply eliminating carbon dioxide emissions altogether and also increasing carbon removal (through carbon absorption in carbon sinks, carbon offsetting and [carbon sequestration](#)).

Carbon neutrality commitments:

- In September 2018, the American State of California became the first to commit itself to carbon neutrality (by 2045).
- In December 2019, the European Union also committed to carbon neutrality by 2050.
- In September 2020, China, the world's largest GHG emitter, also declared its goal of carbon neutrality by 2060.
- This was followed by the announcements by Japan and South Korea to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Way forward:

Need for carbon neutrality:

- The COVID-19 crisis provides an opportunity for reset, recalibration and rethink with respect to **environmentally sustainable economic growth models**.
- Given India's vulnerability to climate change, rather than arguing that its per capita emissions continue to be low, India too should plan for achieving carbon neutrality.
 - India's commitment to ensure 40% of its energy supply through renewable energy sources would help reduce India's GHG emissions.
 - India has committed to creating an additional carbon sink of 2.5 -3 billion tonnes of CO₂ equivalent through additional forest and tree cover by 2030. India's commitment on carbon sequestration through forests could help increase carbon absorption in India's forest reserves.
- Carbon neutrality is a worthwhile goal, the attainment of which has to be consciously engineered through government action and policies.

System level restructuring:

- Renewable energy though may be an integral part of the solution, going forward they alone may not be sufficient and there should be efforts made at **re-architecting systems as a whole**. The overhaul in the German electricity sector is a classical example of such re- architecturing.
- Given that much of the infrastructure we need for the future is still to be put in place — one estimate widely quoted that something like 70% of the infrastructure required in India by the year 2050 is waiting to be established, the **future investment decisions should have sustainability as an important parameter**.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Finally, great banyan tree breathes afresh

What's in News?

With the efforts of Mahabubnagar (Telangana) district administration, Pillalamarri - the great banyan tree of Telangana, has got a new lease of life and is now back in healthy germination.

- The modern-organic treatment has boosted the immunity of the centuries-old giant.
- The officials demonstrated how the dramatically decaying process of the termite-infested tree could be reversed and put back on the growth path.
- To contain the termite attack, chlorpyrifos was sprayed on the tree. Subsequently, holes were drilled into the branches and stem and chlorpyrifos was injected.

Chlorpyrifos:

- Chlorpyrifos (CPS) is an organophosphate pesticide used on crops, animals, and buildings, and in other settings, to kill a number of pests, including insects and worms.
- On the farm, it is used to control ticks on cattle and as a spray to control crop pests.
- It acts on the nervous systems of insects.
- However, it has the potential for both acute toxicity at larger amounts and neurological effects in fetuses and children even at very small amounts.
- It is not soluble in water.

2. Ambedkar Social Innovation Incubation Mission

- Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has launched the Ambedkar Social Innovation and Incubation Mission (ASIIM) under Venture Capital Fund for SCs with a view to promoting innovation and enterprise among SC students studying in higher educational institutions.
- Under the initiative, 1,000 SC youth will be identified in the next four years with start-up ideas through the Technology Business Incubators in various higher educational institutions.
- They will be funded 30 lakh rupees in three years as equity funding to translate their start-up ideas into commercial ventures.
- Successful ventures would further qualify for venture funding of up to five crore rupees from the Venture Capital Fund for SCs.

Note:

- Ministry of Social Justice had launched the Venture Capital Fund for SCs (VCF-SC) in 2014-15 with a view to developing entrepreneurship amongst the SC/Divyang youth and to enable them to become 'job-givers'.
- The objective of this fund is to provide concessional finance to the entities of the SC entrepreneurs.

G. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to National Air Quality Index (AQI) :

1. The AQI has five categories of air quality with a distinct colour scheme.
2. AQI considers eight pollutants for which short-term National Ambient Air Quality Standards are prescribed.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The AQI has six categories of air quality, viz Good, Satisfactory, Moderately polluted, Poor, Very Poor and Severe with a distinct colour scheme.
- Each of these categories is associated with likely health impacts.
- AQI considers eight pollutants (PM10, PM 2.5, NO2, SO2, CO, O3, NH3 and Pb) for which short-term (up to 24-hourly averaging period) National Ambient Air Quality Standards are prescribed.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Ambedkar Social Innovation Incubation Mission:

1. The mission was launched by the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship.
2. It has been launched under the Venture Capital Fund for SCs.
3. The beneficiaries will be funded with Rs. 30 lakhs in 3 years as equity funding.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment has launched the Ambedkar Social Innovation and Incubation Mission (ASIIM) under Venture Capital Fund for SCs with a view to promoting innovation and enterprise among SC students studying in higher educational institutions.
- Under the initiative, 1,000 SC youth will be identified in the next four years with start-up ideas through the Technology Business Incubators in various higher educational institutions.
- They will be funded 30 lakh rupees in three years as equity funding to translate their start-up ideas into commercial ventures.

Q3. "Carbon neutrality" refers to:

- a. The long-term removal, capture or sequestration of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- b. Achieving net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by balancing carbon dioxide emissions with carbon absorption.
- c. Achieving negative carbon dioxide emissions by increasing the carbon absorption and measures such as afforestation to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
- d. Removing carbon oxide from the atmosphere and then storing it.

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Carbon neutrality refers to achieving net-zero carbon dioxide emissions by balancing carbon dioxide emissions with carbon absorption.
- Achieving carbon neutrality has two basic aims, reducing or simply eliminating carbon dioxide emissions altogether and also increasing carbon removal (through carbon absorption in carbon sinks, carbon offsetting and carbon sequestration).

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Chlorpyrifos:

1. It is an organophosphate pesticide used on crops to kill a number of pests and insects.
2. It is used to control ticks on cattle.
3. It has the potential for acute toxicity and neurological effects in foetuses and children.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Chlorpyrifos (CPS) is an organophosphate pesticide used on crops, animals, and buildings, and in other settings, to kill a number of pests, including insects and worms.
- On the farm, it is used to control ticks on cattle and as a spray to control crop pests.
- It acts on the nervous systems of insects.
- However, it has the potential for both acute toxicity at larger amounts and neurological effects in foetuses and children even at very small amounts.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. International Relations are always transactional and it does not matter which party/individual is in power unless and until there are mutual interests involved. Comment in the context of the change in U.S. presidentship and its impact on the India-U.S. relationship. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS Paper 2/International Relations)
2. What is meant by Carbon Neutrality? Discuss the significance of the carbon neutrality principle. Also analyze the viability of such a principle for a developing country like India. (15 marks, 250 words)(GS Paper 3/Environment and Ecology)

