

04 Dec 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

B. GS 2 Related

HEALTH

1. [‘Indian vaccines after phase 3 trials’](#)

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Iran moves to step up nuclear enrichment](#)
2. [‘Carefully monitoring’ Brahmaputra developments: India](#)

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [‘Convicted legislators can’t be barred for life from polls’](#)

C. GS 3 Related

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [Personal choices, the Constitution’s endurance](#)

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [The Iran challenge](#)

ECONOMY

1. [In Farmer’s protest, the core is procurement](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. [Lottery, gambling and betting taxable under GST Act: SC](#)
2. [Cyclone Burevi hits northern Sri Lanka, 12,000 people affected](#)

G. Tidbits

1. [U.S. Senate clears Bill on immigrant visas](#)
2. [Speak for all religions, India tells UN](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: HEALTH

1. [‘Indian vaccines after phase 3 trials’](#)

Context:

India’s vaccines for COVID-19 could be made available for public use after the phase 3 trials.

What is Emergency Use Authorisation?

- Vaccines and medicines, and even diagnostic tests and medical devices, require the approval of a regulatory authority before they can be administered.
- In India, the regulatory authority is the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO).
- For vaccines and medicines, approval is granted after an assessment of their safety and effectiveness, based on data from trials. Approval from the regulator is required at every stage of these trials which is a long process, designed to ensure that a medicine or vaccine is absolutely safe and effective.
- The fastest approval for any vaccine until now was for the mumps vaccine in the 1960s which took about four-and-a-half years after it was developed.
- In emergency situations, like the current one, regulatory authorities around the world have developed mechanisms to grant interim approvals if there is sufficient evidence to suggest a medical product is safe and effective.
- Final approval is granted only after completion of the trials and analysis of full data; until then, emergency use authorisation (EUA) allows the medicine or the vaccine to be used on the public.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Iran moves to step up nuclear enrichment

Context:

Iran's watchdog body has approved a law that obliges the government to halt U.N. inspections of its nuclear sites and step up uranium enrichment beyond the limit set under the 2015 nuclear deal, if sanctions are not eased in a month.

Background:

The latest development comes in the backdrop of the killing of Iran's top nuclear scientist.

Read more on this topic covered in [29th November 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- Iran's Parliament approved the Bill with a strong majority, hardening Iran's nuclear stance.
- Under the new law, Tehran gives one month to the deal's European parties to ease sanctions on Iran's oil and financial sectors, imposed after the U.S.A quit the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018.
- It also says that the government should resume uranium enrichment to 20% and install advanced centrifuges at its Natanz and Fordow nuclear facilities.

However, Iran's President Hassan Rouhani, the architect of the 2015 deal, criticised Parliament's move as harmful to diplomatic efforts aimed at easing U.S. sanctions.

2. 'Carefully monitoring' Brahmaputra developments: India

Context:

India has said that it is carefully monitoring all developments on the Brahmaputra river.

Background:

- A State-run Chinese hydropower firm, POWERCHINA, is planning to build the first downstream dam on the Brahmaputra, known as the Yarlung Zangbo in Tibet.
- While this has raised concerns for India, Beijing has argued that it is its legitimate right to develop hydropower projects on the lower reaches of the river.

This topic has been covered in [30th November 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- As a lower riparian State with considerable established user rights to the waters of the trans-border rivers, the Indian government has consistently conveyed its views and concerns to the Chinese authorities.
- Various issues relating to trans-border rivers are discussed with China under the ambit of an institutionalised Expert Level Mechanism which was established in 2006, as well as through diplomatic channels.
- India has urged China to ensure that the interests of downstream states are not harmed by any activities in upstream areas.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. ‘Convicted legislators can’t be barred for life from polls’

Context:

The Central government has told the Supreme Court that it rejected the idea of barring convicted legislators for life from contesting elections, forming or becoming an office-bearer of a political party.

Details:

- The Election Commission has been endorsing a lifetime ban on convicted legislators from contesting elections, forming or becoming an office-bearer of a political party as necessary to champion the cause of decriminalisation of politics.
- However, under the [Representation of the People Act of 1951](#), a legislator who has been convicted for serious offences is disqualified for the period of the prison sentence and six years thereafter.

Read more on the criminalisation of politics covered in [10th July 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

1. Personal choices, the Constitution's endurance

Background: A few state governments are vigorously pursuing to draft a law that would have an impact on the way certain inter-faith marriages are conducted, what is casually termed as “Love jihad”.

Context: Allahabad High Court has declared that religious conversions are a part of an individual's [fundamental right](#), even if it is meant only for marriage.

Details:

1. Right to Privacy

1. The famous [K.S.Puttaswamy case](#) recognized the Right to Privacy as intrinsic to an individual's life.
2. Every individual has autonomy in the sphere of personal matters such as marriage, choice of a life partner, procreation, sexual orientation to name a few.
3. Right to Privacy is pivotal to an individual's sense of dignity and is essential for living a dignified life.

2. Salamat Ansari and Priyanka Kharwar

1. Recently, a First Information Report (FIR) was filed and a number of charges were levelled against the marriage between Salamat Ansari and Priyanka Kharwar.
2. The charges were as grave as charging the groom of abducting a woman with an intent to marry her against her wishes, which is punishable under Section 366 of the IPC.
3. This was challenged by the couple that it was a marital union of two consenting adults, and there was no involvement of any force or fraud.
4. The FIR has its reasoning based on the verdict delivered by the single judge of the Allahabad High Court in Noor Jahan vs State of U.P (2014).
5. The above ruling stated that conversion by an individual, solely for the purpose of marriage is invalid, for such a conversion must only be preceded by a “change of heart” and an “honest conviction” in the tenets of the newly adopted religion.
6. Additional to the above-mentioned conditionalities, the ruling placed a burden of proof on the individuals converting.

3. Divisional Bench of Allahabad court

1. The ruling in the Noor Jahan case was overruled by the divisional bench of Allahabad Court by terming it as incomplete.
2. The recent ruling by the divisional bench of the Allahabad High Court gave primacy to the individual's choice. It said that marrying an individual of his/her choice is a matter of right.
3. The prospects of change of religion is solely an individual's space, a space that's not to be encroached by the State.
4. Constitutional provisions provide such opportunity for the people and it shall not be curtailed by laws based on unfound logic.

4. Article 25

1. All persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practise, and propagate religion subject to public order, morality, and health.
2. Article 25 is as much about the right to make choices as it is about the right to religion.
3. The right to freedom of conscience essentially allows an individual to mould his/her beliefs, morals, values. This gives a broad horizon for an individual to mould and shape his/her belief system.

4. The protection of freedom of conscience is based on the need to protect ethical autonomy and allow individuals to lead a life of their making.
5. The liberty of an individual to decide on her life partner cannot be made conditional on her understanding of the tenets of religion; this is a violation of the freedom of conscience under Article 25 of the Indian constitution.
5. **Uttar Pradesh state government's ordinance**
 1. The ordinance prohibits any conversion made solely for the purpose of marriage.
 2. The State will rely largely on the 1977 Supreme Court ruling in the Rev. Stanislaus v/s State of M.P, where the grounds of public order was used to uphold anti-conversion statutes enacted by Madhya Pradesh and Odisha.
 3. These statutes required a prior intimation of the District Magistrate each time conversion was to take place and upon this, the District Magistrate was also given additional powers to ascertain if such conversion was made on fraudulent grounds.
 4. The act of intimation to DM and also having to bear the burden of proof erodes the free nature of freedom of conscience under Article 25.

Conclusion

The Indian Constitution provides the right balance between freedom of an individual and State's responsibility to govern and any attempt to curtail individual's rights by giving wider grounds for state's intervention especially in matters of personal matters is a retrograde step.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The Iran challenge

Background:

- The Obama administration between 2008 and 2016 worked hard to get Iran and USA ties back on track after decades of mutual animosity.
- The signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and fighting the Islamic State together in Iraq were the tangible outcomes of improving relations between the two.

Context:

- The Joe Biden presidency following Donald Trump's term at the office has to undo certain damages done by the outgoing President Donald Trump.

Details

1. Donald Trump's Iran Policy

1. Donald Trump was very vocal in his criticism of the Iranian regime and singled out Iran for numerous incidents in the Middle-east.
2. Donald Trump went as far as pulling out of JCPOA and imposed strict sanctions on Iran.
3. He termed his policy as 'Maximum Pressure'. He was hoping that the US and its allies would pressurize Iran to return to the negotiating table and it would be a perfect opportunity for the US to dictate terms to Iran.
4. However, 'Maximum Pressure' was met with 'Maximum Resistance' from Iran which refused to buckle down under pressure and met force with force.

5. This confrontation was seen in incidences such as Iran shooting down a US drone over the Gulf and the US killing Iranian General Qasem Soleimani earlier this year.
2. **Change of guard in the US**
 1. Joe Biden is the new President-elect, he served successfully under the previous Democrat President Obama and was instrumental in bringing the US-Iran ties on a positive track.
 2. Currently, he faces a huge task ahead of him to repair the broken ties and at the same time keep the US allies in the region happy.
 3. He has promised that the US will work towards getting JCPOA back on track, but with minor revision.
 4. The US getting itself back in the JCPOA may have to overcome opposition from its allies in West Asia.
 5. The US's role as a mediator or for the maintenance of order in the region has diluted in the past 4 years. The challenge for President Biden is to change it.
3. **Mohsen Fakhrizadeh**
 1. The recent assassination of the nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a top Iranian nuclear scientist has made the region simmer with tensions. Iran has officially gone on record saying that it will avenge his death.
 2. Israel, a major ally of the US in the region, has been accused of conducting this covert operation.

Way Forward

- The responsibility on the shoulders of the new US regime is immense, it has to work patiently with Iran and at the same time have its allies on board. This would require a great deal of proactive diplomacy and numerous backchannel talks.
- This can begin with the re-entry of US into the JCPOA, for it can bring Iran to negotiation and can hold Iran accountable for its actions. An Iran with no strings attached would threaten regional security and peace.

Category: ECONOMY

1. In Farmer's protest, the core is procurement

Context: Uncertainty over [Minimum Support Price](#) and fears over the dismantling of public procurement has heightened the fears among the farmers, leading to protests in large parts of Punjab and Haryana.

Details:

1. **Government's defense of Farm Acts**
 1. The Acts intend to maximize the options available to farmers in the output markets.
 2. MSP system will be unaltered and public procurement shall continue to exist.
 3. The government points out that there is no mention of either MSP or procurement in the Acts, thus the fear is unfounded.
2. **Why are protests intensified in Punjab and Haryana?**
 1. The Public Distribution System (PDS) is the backbone of the agrarian set up in Punjab and Haryana.
 2. Public procurement via MSP is very significant to the farmers of these two states especially.
 3. This is highlighted by the statistics. Close to 88% of the paddy production and 70% of the wheat production in Punjab and Haryana have been accepted by the public procurement.

4. Compare this with other states concerning rice public procurement, only as far as 44% of rice production in Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha is absorbed by public procurement. The percentage slumps further for wheat public procurement as a share of production.

3. National Food Security Act (NFSA)

1. The NFSA entails the government to procure foodgrains to be distributed as entitlements to close to 80 crore beneficiaries. Add to this another 8 crore migrants who need the foodgrains under [NFSA](#).
2. Punjab and Haryana are the major suppliers of wheat and paddy to the Government to sustain PDS.
3. If the data of the previous three years is to go by, close to 40% of the total paddy produce and 32% of wheat production have been procured by public agencies to meet the PDS obligations.
4. The COVID pandemic and the migrant crisis has meant additional beneficiary allocation, meaning additional procurement.
5. The MSP led procurement via public agencies protects the farmer as well as the Government. The Government cannot afford to procure these huge quantities of wheat and rice from the open market, especially in the present scenario where the stock limits under the Essential Commodities Act has been removed, paving way for large scale hoarding.

4. Interdependence

1. The Government's large procurement needs require MSP led procurement via public agencies.
2. The obligations are more so in the times of the pandemic with the beneficiary list seeming to expand. Thus the Government requires the foodgrains from these two states.
3. The farmers of these two states also rely upon Government procurement, this provision safeguards them from price volatility.
4. Therefore from the above-stated points, it is easy to derive the mutual interdependence between the farmers and the Government.

Conclusion

- It is important that there is a constructive dialogue between the Government and the farmer trade unions to assuage the fears of farmers, who are heavily dependent on farm incomes.
- There is a need to establish a communication channel between the two actors, this will ensure there is less room for speculation and misunderstanding and more room for understanding the Government's intentions of the acts and farmers' misgivings.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Lottery, gambling and betting taxable under GST Act: SC

- The Supreme Court has held that lottery, gambling and betting are taxable under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Act.
- It asserted that lottery, gambling and betting were actionable claims and came within the definition of 'goods' under Section 2(52) of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017.

2. Cyclone Burevi hits northern Sri Lanka, 12,000 people affected

What's in News?

Shortly after [Cyclone Nivar](#) hit the Karaikal coast, cyclone Burevi made landfall in Sri Lanka.

Cyclone Burevi:

- Cyclone Burevi is named by the Maldives.
- It is said that Cyclone Burevi will not be as strong as Cyclone Nivar as it would have limited intensity due to upwelling caused by Cyclone Nivar.
- Upwelling is caused when two consecutive systems develop in the same region of the ocean.
- The preceding cyclonic system causes upwelling. This happens when the cooler water from the lower ocean surface is pushed upwards towards the upper ocean surface.
- Owing to the absence of warm sea surface conditions the succeeding cyclonic system would not be as strong as the preceding one.
- In this case, Cyclone Burevi would not be as strong as Cyclone Nivar.

Read more on Tropical Cyclones covered in [29th October 2019 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

G. Tidbits

1. U.S. Senate clears Bill on immigrant visas

What's in News?

The U.S. Senate has unanimously passed The Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act that eliminates the per-country numerical limitation for employment-based immigrant visas and raises it for family-based visas.

Details:

- The legislation increases the per-country cap on family-based immigrant visas from 7% of the total number of such visas available that year to 15%.
- It will hugely benefit hundreds of thousands of Indian professionals in America who have been waiting to get their green cards.

2. Speak for all religions, India tells UN

What's in News?

A 'Culture of Peace' session was organised by the [UN General Assembly](#). The UN has organised such sessions each year since 1997.

- At the session, India asked the United Nations to expand its criticism of hatred and violence against religions beyond the three Abrahamic religions — Judaism, Christianity and Islam.
- First Secretary at India's Permanent Mission to the UN argued that the body failed to acknowledge the rise of hatred and violence against Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism.
- He called upon the UN Alliance of Civilizations to speak for all, not just a select few.

Note:

In 2001, the General Assembly adopted a resolution without a vote condemning the Taliban for destroying cultural artefacts, including the Buddhist sculptures in Bamiyan.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Where are the Natanz and Fordow nuclear facilities located?

- a. Russia
- b. Israel
- c. Iran
- d. North Korea

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: c

Explanation:

Iran's nuclear program is made up of a number of nuclear facilities, including nuclear reactors and various nuclear fuel cycle facilities. Natanz and Fordow nuclear facilities are among those.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to RT-PCR Testing:

1. It is a nuclear-derived method for detecting the presence of specific genetic material from any pathogen.
2. It combines reverse transcription of RNA into DNA and amplification of specific DNA targets using polymerase chain reaction.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Both statements are correct.
- RT-PCR (reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction) is a nuclear-derived method for detecting the presence of specific genetic material from any pathogen, including a virus.
- RT-PCR is a laboratory technique combining reverse transcription of RNA into DNA and amplification of specific DNA targets using polymerase chain reaction.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. The definition of goods under the GST Act includes actionable claim.
2. The term actionable claim is defined under GST law.
3. Lottery, gambling and betting are taxable under the GST Act as they are actionable claims.

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

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

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- GST Law does not define Actionable Claim separately under the Act. The definition for an actionable claim is taken as the one defined in Section 3 of the Transfer of Property Act.
- The definition of goods under the GST Act includes actionable claim.
- The Supreme Court has held that lottery, gambling and betting are taxable under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Act.
- It asserted that lottery, gambling and betting were actionable claims and came within the definition of 'goods' under Section 2(52) of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017.
- The term actionable claim is every kind of claim in a movable property which would be enforced through the courts.
- Actionable Claim relating to lottery, betting and gambling alone will be regarded as 'Goods' since the definition of goods under Section 2(52) includes actionable claim.
- Therefore, only lottery, betting and gambling shall be treated as supplies under the GST regime.

Q4. Which country has India procured the Poseidon P-8I aircrafts from?

- a. Russia
- b. The U.S.A
- c. Japan
- d. France

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Poseidon P-8I aircraft is a maritime reconnaissance and anti-submarine warfare aircraft from the US.
- The P-8I, based on the Boeing next-generation 737 commercial airplane, is a variant of the P-8A Poseidon used by the US Navy. India was Boeing's first international customer for this aircraft.
- The first P-8I aircraft was inducted into the Indian Navy in 2013.
- The P-8Is were deployed to carry out surveillance on the movement of Chinese troops in eastern Ladakh in the last few months.
- The reconnaissance aircraft was deployed in Doklam along the Sikkim border too during the 73-day standoff between Indian and Chinese troops in 2017.
- The P-8Is were also deployed to keep an eye on the movement of Pakistani troops after the Pulwama terror attack.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Explain the concept of 'Rights-based approach' and provide adequate examples to substantiate your answer. (15 marks, 250 words) [GS2, Polity]
2. Discuss how fluctuation in the US policy of Iran has affected the India - Iran relationship. (10 marks, 150 words). [GS2, International Relations]

