

11 Dec 2020: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Rajnath pitches for dialogue

Context

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh addressed the [ASEAN](#) Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) on the occasion of its 10th anniversary.

Details

- He reiterated India's support to freedom of navigation in international waters in accordance with the [UN Convention on the Law of the Sea \(UNCLOS\)](#)
- He underlined the need to collectively address threats to a rules-based order, maritime security, cyber-crimes and terror.

ADMM-Plus

- The ADMM-Plus is a platform for ASEAN and its eight Dialogue Partners, namely Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, ROK, Russian Federation and the United States, to strengthen security and defence cooperation for peace, stability, and development in the region.
- The ADMM-Plus currently focuses on seven areas of practical cooperation, namely maritime security, counter-terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster management, peacekeeping operations, military medicine, humanitarian mine action and cybersecurity
- The Inaugural ADMM-Plus was convened in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, in 2010.

Objectives of the ADMM-Plus

- To promote mutual trust and confidence between defence establishments through greater dialogue and transparency;
- To enhance regional peace and stability through cooperation in defence and security, in view of the transnational security challenges the region faces;

2. Morocco to normalise ties with Israel

Context

- Morocco has agreed to resume diplomatic relations with Israel, becoming the fourth Arab nation to recognise Israel under a deal brokered by the US in 2020.

Details

- The development comes as the **US is expanding the number of countries under the "Abraham Accords"**, as part of which the United Arab Emirates and Israel resumed bilateral ties
- Bahrain and Sudan had followed the UAE, becoming the second and third Arab countries respectively to resume ties with Israel.
 - Along with Egypt and Jordan, Morocco becomes the sixth Arab League member to normalise ties with Israel.

- King Mohammed VI of Morocco agreed to resume diplomatic ties between his kingdom and Israel to expand economic and cultural cooperation, which would advance regional stability.
- As part of this deal, Morocco will establish full diplomatic relations and resume official contacts with Israel. It will grant overflights and direct flights to and from Israel for all Israelis

What about Western Sahara?

- As part of the agreement, US President Donald Trump changed longstanding US policy and recognised Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara.
- Western Sahara territory a former Spanish colony, was annexed by Morocco in 1975. Since then it has been the subject of a long-running territorial dispute between Morocco and its indigenous Saharawi people, led by the pro-independence Polisario Front.
- Morocco says it has always been part of its territory, while the African Union recognises it as an independent state.
- An UN-brokered truce took place in 1991 and the promise of a referendum on independence, which is yet to take place.



How the deal will affect Western Sahara?

- Trump's backing of Morocco's claim to sovereignty over Western Sahara is a big deal because it diminishes the hope of a people who have aspired for the independence of that territory for decades.

- The UN is still mandated to oversee a referendum for the independence of Western Sahara – although this hasn't materialised since 1991 when it established its mission there known as Minurso.

Impact

- Much of the momentum behind the deal-making has been to present a united front against Iran and roll back its regional influence.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Asian Development Outlook (ADO)

- It is a series of annual economic reports released by the Asian Development Bank.
- The ADO provides a comprehensive analysis of macroeconomic and development issues, for most countries in Asia.

Projections

- The Asian Development Bank (ADB) upgraded its forecast for the Indian economy, projecting 8% contraction in 2020-21 as compared to 9% estimated earlier
- Highlighting that India was recovering more rapidly than expected, the ADB said the earlier South Asia forecast of 6.8% contraction was upgraded to (-)6.1% in line with an improved projection for India.

Reference: Asian Development Bank (ADB).

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Iran's calculated risk

Background:

- The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was signed between Iran and P5+1 nations.
- Under the deal:
 - Iran agreed to reduce its number of centrifuges – tube-shaped machines that help enrich uranium – by two-thirds.
 - Iran agreed to bring down its stockpile of enriched uranium by 98% and limit uranium enrichment to 3.67%.
 - Iran consented to give access to inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN's nuclear watchdog agency, to its nuclear facilities, among other facilities.

- In exchange, Iran would have the sanctions lifted.

Context:

The change of guard in the US has brought into focus the nature of policy that will be pursued with regards to Iran.

Details:

1. **Barack Obama's conciliatory policy.**

- The Obama administration saw Iran as a threat to not only US interests in the region but also to global peace.
- Hence, the US under Barack Obama wanted to make Iran responsible for its actions, putting Iran under severe sanctions would only give them an opportunity to be more reckless in their conduct.
- The US saw the only way to make Iran accountable for its actions is to bring them to the negotiating table and arrange an agreement and also pin accountability on them if they renege on such an agreement.
- The agreement would mean that Iran would have to phase down its nuclear programme and the US will have to lift sanctions imposed on Iran.

2. **West Asia triangle**

- Israel, Saudi Arabia along with Iran constitute the three poles of West Asia, the balance of power dynamics in the region is largely controlled by these three actors
- The US attempts to strike a deal with Iran over its nuclear programme did not go down well with its allies in the region, namely, Saudi Arabia and Israel.
- Israel and Saudi Arabia were of the opinion that the agreement would lift the stature of Iran in the region, something that Israel and Saudi Arabia couldn't live with, for Israel and Saudi Arabia gained a lot by terming Iran as a 'rogue nation', 'irresponsible actor' and 'mischief monger'.
- The lifting of sanctions would also enable Iran to regain its natural economic and political might and widen Iran's influence in the region.
- Iran's resurgence doesn't bode well for the other two, its backing of non-state militias and the ambition to emerge as a hegemon in the region based on the political heft of the Shia community.
- Thus Israel and Saudi Arabia made their displeasure with respect to the agreement from the beginning.

3. **'Maximum pressure' policy**

- 2016 saw the coming of Donald Trump to the white house as the new President of the US. His policy was the polar opposite of what the previous administration had worked towards.
- Donald Trump was very vocal in his criticism of the Iranian regime, singled out Iran for numerous incidents in the Middle-east. Donald Trump went as far as pulling out of JCPOA and imposed strict sanctions on Iran.
- The US pullout came even after the United Nations acknowledging that Iran was compliant with the terms of the agreement. Thus pulling out of the JCPOA and re-imposing severe sanctions meant that Iran was backed into a corner

- 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, this was welcomed by Israel and Saudi Arabia.
 - The US actions meant that Israel got the opening it was eyeing to carry out its numerous covert and overt operations against Iran. This was very evident when Israeli agents carried out an audacious operation to steal the documents pertaining to Iran's nuclear programme from a warehouse in Iran.
 - Iran's nuclear scientists came under attack as seen in the recent assassination of Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, Iranian military personnel in Syria also suffered at the hands of Israeli bombing.
4. **Joe Biden era set to take off.**
- The new President-elect Joe Biden was part of the Obama administration, Biden served as Obama's vice-president.
 - Therefore, it is no surprise that Biden wants to reinstate the agreement albeit with few additional conditions.
 - He has the responsibility to ensure that the Middle-east is stable and has all the major players on board.
5. **Iran's conundrum**
- On one hand, Iran risks inviting more sanctions and losing goodwill if it retaliates to the killing of its nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh and if it doesn't retaliate it will be seen as a weak move.
 - Iran has, however, has taken a more prudent choice by not walking into the trap by retaliating, instead, it has resorted to bringing about legislation that permits Iran to enrich Uranium to a20% from the current 5%. This is still within the weapon-grade level of 90%. And also to stop UN access to its top nuclear reactors if sanctions are not lifted.
6. **India's interest**
- India's economic and security interests will be impacted by the turn of events in the immediate neighbourhood of West Asia.
 - The **RBI** said that 52% of remittances to India come from the Gulf and West Asia and also the safety of a large amount of Indian diaspora is of immense concern to India.
 - India's growth aspirations are intertwined with energy security and the region is the primary crude oil source to India and any disruption due to geopolitical tensions will have a telling effect on India's economy.

Conclusion

- The West Asia region has never been short of drama and tension, the three major players are committed to neutralizing any efforts to gain preponderance.
- The US has the opportunity to get Iran back to the negotiating table and it has to expend adequate diplomatic capital in bringing its allies Israel and Saudi Arabia on board.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Grain and chaff

Context:

- The absence of conciliation on the horizon between the farmers and the Government has led to several farmers' organisations calling for the blockade of Delhi's highways to Jaipur and Agra.
- The farm legislation have brought farmers and the union government on a collision course.

Details:

1. Farmer protests.

- The passing of the farm acts are believed to bring about a massive change in the farming landscape, this has led to large scale protests, especially by the farmers of Haryana and Punjab.
- The farmers are camping around the national capital expecting themselves to be heard.

2. Lack of assurance over Minimum Support Price and public procurement.

- Uncertainty over [Minimum Support Price](#) and fears over the dismantling of public procurement has heightened the fears among the farmers.
- The Government has so far not issued a written statement committing to continued existence of MSP led public procurement.
- The other concerns like parity between state-run and private Mandis, registration of traders and dispute resolution mechanisms have not been heeded as well.

3. Risks faced by farmers

- Farmers run the dual risk of market and weather, while the latter is largely uncontrollable, but the former can be managed.
- A sound government policy will help minimize market risk, therefore government policies must aim to ensure agriculture is not at the mercy of market forces.
- Public procurement at MSP is seen as a cushion against price shocks to the farmers, especially when close to 85% of Indian farmers are small and marginal farmers, the farm income is, therefore, the backbone of the rural economy.

4. Food security.

- Food security has been a major concern in India, food security is largely defined by the availability and accessibility of food. India ranked 76th in 113 countries assessed by The Global Food Security
- The above picture requires more proactive efforts from the side of the government, leaving the farming and marketing of agriculture produce entirely to market forces is nothing but a path to disaster.
- Several free-market countries have a certain degree of government control over farming and marketing and this has been conceded at the [World Trade Organisation \(WTO\)](#).

Way forward

- The need for reforms cannot be dismissed, but to do it unilaterally without much deliberation at the Parliament and not consulting the farmers and leaving other stakeholders in the dark has not gone down well.
- The Union has the responsibility towards the farmers who are the backbone of food security, thus cannot be left at the mercy of market forces.
- The first step in resolving the deadlock will begin from guaranteeing MSP and reassuring the farmers of procurement and subsidies and this has to be done through the letter of law to restore the lost trust in the government.

Category: HEALTH

1. True to its name.

Context:

Granting approval to COVID-19 vaccines tested and manufactured in India

Background:

Drug Controller General of India (DCGI) is responsible for approval of licenses of specified categories of drugs such as blood and blood products, I.V. Fluids, Vaccine and Sera.

Details:

1. Safety of the vaccine cannot be compromised.

- The need for **COVID-19** vaccine has meant that several pharma companies are working round the clock for developing a vaccine, running clinical trials, doing everything to get the vaccine in the market.
- While it is great that the world is on the brink of coming up with a vaccine to neutralize the pandemic, it is to be ensured that it is not done in haste.
- The importance of a vaccine cannot be downplayed but it cannot come at the cost of safety, it means that the vaccine has to go through each phase of vaccine development, without having to jump the gun.

2. Drug Controller General of India's stance.

- The DCGI, which is responsible for granting licenses to drugs has laid to rest any doubts and concerns over the approval of COVID-19 vaccine.
- It has categorically put it on record that without the adequate data, the vaccines won't be issued a clearance even for emergency purposes.
- It has sought additional data with regards to safety and immunogenicity from Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech, based in Pune and Hyderabad respectively.
- The deferment of approval over the need to have more concrete data will infuse more trust and faith on the regulator and in the long run will help in fighting 'Vaccine hesitancy'- Refers to delay in acceptance or refusal of vaccines despite availability of vaccine services owing to many reasons, one of them being doubts over the safety of the vaccine

3. **Hastiness to seek approval.**

- Bharath Biotech
 1. Its move to secure clearance without having submitted from the phase-3 trials has been surprising.
 2. It has in return chose to rely on the phase1 and phase 2 safety and immunogenicity data
- The Serum
 1. It submitted interim safety and immunogenicity data of the Oxford vaccine from phase 2 and phase 3 clinical trials held in India and other countries.
 2. The safety data of the Indian trial was submitted only until mid-November. There are questions over the data submitted because, the phase-3 trials began on September 21, and since the second dose is administered with a time interval of 28 days and the median follow-up after the second dose would have been for just a few weeks.
 3. Therefore with lack of satisfaction on behalf of the drug regulator, the DCGI has asked for immunogenicity data from the U.K trial.

4. **Approval and regulatory standards**

- Several global vaccine manufacturers signed a joint pledge stating that they would not rush in haste to seek approvals from the regulatory authorities without testing it as per the standard framework.
- The Indian manufacturers should strive to achieve the highest standards in testing without the need to act in haste.
- Public trust is very important for a successful vaccination campaign, any shreds of doubt over the efficacy of the vaccine might lead to people skirting vaccination.

Conclusion

- The DCGI has done the right thing by summoning more data from the clinical trials, it has done well not to act prematurely.
- It is the responsibility of both the drug manufacturers and the regulators to ensure that the vaccine is fail-proof, if both the actors do their duty without compromising on anything, then the world will soon have the first COVID-19 vaccine that is efficient and safe.

F. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Prelims Facts

1. HelpAge India presented UN Population Award for 2020

Context

- NGO HelpAge India received the “2020 UN Population Award” for its contribution towards serving disadvantaged elderly people and raising awareness on their cause.

Details

- HelpAge India became the first Indian NGO to be awarded the prestigious 2020 UN Population Award in the institutional category.
 - The last time the Award came to an Indian was 28 years ago, back in 1992, when it was awarded to Mr. J.R.D. Tata as an individual laureate.
- The selection of HelpAge is in recognition of its work on population issues and efforts in the realisation of rights of older persons in India since 1978.
- The award brings focus to the issue of ageing with India housing an estimated 140 million elderly.
- It works for the welfare of the elderly.

UN Population Award

- It was established by the [United Nations General Assembly \(UNGA\)](#) in 1981
- It recognises contributions in the fields of population and reproductive health.
- It consists of a gold medal, a diploma and a monetary prize.

Also Read: [United Nations Population Fund \(UNFPA\)](#).

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Herod's Palace recently seen in news is in which country?

- a. Iran
- b. Indonesia
- c. Israel
- d. Japan

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Israeli authorities are set to unveil previously off-limits structures within King Herod's palace-fortress Herodium
- Herod's Palace at Jerusalem was built by Herod I the Great, King of Judea

Q2. Consider the following statements with reference to Kathakali:

1. It is a well-known dance drama from the state of Kerala whose movements are influenced by ancient martial arts and athletic tradition
2. It is performed by Male dancers only

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

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both
- d. None

CHECK ANSWERS:-

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Kathakali has always been considered a male art form.
- History proves that though women were not welcome during the years when Kathakali made its mark as an art, it still could not stop women from being a part of it.
- Although many women were attracted to Kathakali and learned it, to perform on stage they had to create their own space.
- That resulted in women-only groups formed in different parts of Kerala. They succeeded in staging Kathakali plays and created a parallel space for Kathakali and women.

Q3. The only African country with coastal exposure to both the

Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea is

- a. Algeria
- b. Mauritania
- c. Morocco
- d. Libya

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Morocco borders Algeria to the east and southeast, Western Sahara to the south, the Atlantic Ocean to the west, and the Mediterranean Sea to the north.
- It is the only African country with coastal exposure to both the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea.

Q4. Which of the following are correctly matched?

Wildlife Sanctuary	State
1. Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary	Arunachal Pradesh
2. Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary	Tamilnadu
3. Sipahijola Wildlife Sanctuary	West Bengal

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary- Kerala
- Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary- Assam
- Sipahijola Wildlife Sanctuary- Tripura

Q5. Which of the following statement/s about C. Rajagopalachari is/are correct?

1. He was independent India's first and last Indian Governor General.
2. Rajagopalachari founded the Swatantra Party and was one of the first recipients of India's highest civilian award, the Bharat Ratna.

3. It was founded on the conviction that social justice and welfare can be attained through the fostering of individual interest and individual enterprise in all fields better than through State ownership and Government control.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Please refer [This Day in History – 25th Dec.](#)

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. “US’s exit from the Iran nuke deal may have collateral consequences for India”, In the light of the above statement explain the outcomes for India. (10 marks 150 words; INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS)
2. India's agriculture marketing and its cropping pattern both undoubtedly require reforms, Discuss. (15 marks, 250 words; ECONOMY)