

16 Jan 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. After U.S., Russia pulls out of Open Skies treaty

Context:

Russia has announced that it is pulling out of the Open Skies treaty (OST).

Details:

- Russia said that the pact, which allows unarmed surveillance flights over member countries, had been seriously compromised by the withdrawal of the United States.
- Russia said in a statement that Moscow had made specific proposals to other members to mitigate against the impact of the U.S. exit but that those proposals were not backed by Washington's allies.
- It has raised concerns that despite leaving the treaty Washington could potentially retain access to overflight intelligence gathered by allies who remain members in the treaty.

Open Skies Treaty:

- The Open Skies Treaty was signed in 1992 and came into effect in 2002.
- The agreement allows its 34 signatories to conduct unarmed reconnaissance flights over the territory of treaty countries to monitor signatories' arms development activities.

Read more on this topic covered in **Treaty on Open Skies: RSTV- Big Picture**

Concerns:

- Arms control tensions have been rising between Moscow and Washington.
- The New Start Treaty is set to expire in February 2021.
 - New Start Treaty is an agreement that caps Russian and U.S. nuclear arsenal.
- The United States left the Open Skies arms control and verification treaty in November 2020, accusing Russia of violating it.
- The U.S.'s exit from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty and its departure from the OST have raised the strong possibility that the U.S. administration may not renew the New Start Treaty.
- The U.S. administration has been worried that extending New Start without including China would help China increase its nuclear arsenal.
- The U.S. intends to establish a new arms control regime which would include China.

2. Unveiled document highlights Trump's mixed China legacy

Context:

A declassified 2018 Strategic Framework for the Indo-Pacific was made public by the Trump administration in its last week in office.

Details:

- The document underlines how prominently strategic competition between the U.S. and China set Washington's regional policy over the past four years, and President Donald Trump's mixed record in effectively addressing that challenge.
- Among the objectives outlined in the document are:
 - Promoting American values throughout the region to counterbalance values being promoted by China.
 - Deterring China from using force or threats against U.S. allies and partners.
 - Building a credible economic response and advancing "U.S. global economic leadership" to counter China's influence and its projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative.
- While the Trump administration did achieve some of the outlined objectives, particularly in expanding security cooperation with India, Japan and Australia — or the "[Quad](#)", its economic aspirations, as well as building a broader coalition to respond to China's actions, remain works-in-progress.
- Trump's inconsistent approach to many of America's own allies and partners, particularly on the trade front, has been one major obstacle.
 - One of his first acts in office was to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement, which would have created the world's biggest trading bloc without China.
 - The agreement was later concluded without the U.S.
- The end of his term saw the China-backed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) agreement come into force.
 - This includes Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand, four countries that the U.S. had hoped to align with to offer a robust economic regional response to China.

China's response:

- China hit out at the document, saying that it proves the malign motives of the U.S. side to contain China.

The U.S relations with India:

- Wary of the unpredictability in Washington, countries including India and Japan moved to try and shore up relations with China.
- However, the U.S. relations with India emerge as one major positive.
- The framework describes one of its desired end-states – the U.S. becoming India's "preferred partner on security issues".
- The two countries have been cooperating to counter Chinese influence in South and Southeast Asia. However, this remains a work-in-progress.

3. Nepal raises Kalapani boundary issue with India**Context:**

During the Joint Commission meeting, Nepal's Foreign Minister has raised the Kalapani boundary dispute with India.

Details:

- The Minister said that the Indo-Nepal boundary dispute existed in two segments and Kathmandu wished to find a solution to the matter urgently.
- This is the first time that the Foreign Minister of Nepal has presented the dispute on the boundary front from the Indian capital since the issue erupted in November 2019 following which Nepal unveiled a new political map that showed the Kalapani-Lipulekh-Limpiyadhura region of Pithoragarh district as part of the country's sovereign territory.
- Noting that there were ups and downs in the India-Nepal relations and differences on some issues, the foreign minister said that the overall partnership and relations moved smoothly.
- The statement from Nepal said that both the teams "discussed the review of the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950".

Read more on this topic covered in **13th January 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.**

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Trade with China shrank in 2020, deficit at five-year low

Context:

India's trade with China declined last year to the lowest level since 2017.

Details:

- India's trade deficit with China narrowed to a five-year low in 2020.
- India's imports from China shrank by 10.8% marking the lowest level of inbound shipments since 2016.
- India's exports to China, however, jumped 16%, crossing the \$20 billion mark for the first time to a record high.

What does the trade deficit imply?

- The drop in India's imports from China largely mirrored a decline in overall inbound shipments in 2020 as domestic demand slumped in the wake of the pandemic.
- This makes it difficult to determine whether 2020 is an exception or marks a turn away from the recent pattern of India's trade with China.
- As yet, there is no evidence to suggest India has replaced its import dependence on China by either sourcing those goods elsewhere or manufacturing them at home.

Note:

- 2020 saw a surge in demand for iron ore in China. Total iron ore imports in Asia's largest economy rose 9.5% in 2020.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: HEALTH

1. Vaccine optimism and the scientific uncertainty link

Context:

India is now embarking on the world's largest COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Details:

- India has a robust domestic vaccine industry and strong fundamentals of the Universal Immunisation Programme.
- The COVID-19 vaccination programme represents the creation of a novel public-private collaboration wherein the vaccine supply is under the responsibility of Indian pharma companies and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for the implementation of the programme.
- The vaccine development programme has received generous support from the government.
- Two vaccines Covishield and Covaxin have been granted permission, however, for restricted use in an emergency situation subject to certain regulatory conditions.

Issues:

- The expedited vaccine development was guided by the adaptive and seamless approach advocated by the World Health Organization (WHO) for public health emergencies and promoted by the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation.
- However, some of the regulatory issues are focused on the authorisation process.

Traditional clinical trials:

- Traditional clinical trials follow a straightforward but mandatory three-step approach.
- Designing, conducting and analysing the collected data according to a pre-specified analysis plan.

Adaptive designs:

- Seamless adaptive designs add a review-adapt loop to the linear design-conduct-analysis sequence, with a pre-defined one primary endpoint and several secondary endpoints.
- An adaptation is referred to a change made to the trial procedure while a clinical trial is at the design stage.
 - These are deduced planned adaptations and should be based on data collected from the study itself.

- They are different from unplanned ad hoc modifications that are common in traditional trials.

Impact of modifications:

- In the present situation, where the clinical trial of both vaccines are being done, community engagement is critical to establish community acceptability of control arms, placebo, and blinding.
- Acceptability may impact whether trials are individually or cluster randomised, blinded or unblinded, and have use of a placebo or other comparator.
- Drawing of blood and other such unique cultural considerations may impact the study design, and in turn the choice of endpoints collected in the study.

Key regulatory concerns and the challenges:

- There are some key regulatory concerns and the challenge of communicating them to the users and beneficiaries of research including policymakers.
 - What is the level of adaptation that is agreed to by the regulatory agencies?
 - What are the regulatory standards for the review and approval process of data obtained from adaptive trials with different levels of modifications?
 - And, most critically, has the trial become a totally different trial after the modifications for addressing the study objectives of the originally planned clinical trial?

Way forward:

Need for more caution:

- The European Medicines Agency cautions that drug use in late Phase II or confirmatory Phase III trials deserves a more cautionary approach.
- Pharmacology experts thus opine that adaptation and adaptive designs should not be seen as a cure for poor planning.
- The challenge is to minimise operational bias by rigorous planning and transparency.

Building trust:

- Trust-building in the vaccine and its rollout is important for a robust communication strategy.
- There is also a need to build and sustain trust through clear and comprehensive sharing of the adaptive design protocols in scientific journals for peer guidance.
- This would have obvious implications for vaccine confidence.
 - According to WHO, vaccine confidence encompasses trust in the effectiveness and safety of the vaccine as much as in the system that delivers.

Adequacy of processes:

- An important aspect is also the perceived motivations of policymakers making decisions about the vaccine.
- With uncertainty on the effectiveness and safety of the vaccine, the rollout decisions may add to the scepticism.

- There is a need for imaginative social and behavioural research that takes on board the scientific uncertainties and helps to build trust in the health service system and the community.
- Lack of adequate processes that build trust does not augur well for programme implementation despite the efforts to promote and sustain vaccine demand.
- Community engagement should adhere to WHO's guidelines on good participatory practice (GPP).

Transparency and openness:

- In the present context, the task is to be able to communicate scientific uncertainty to policymakers and the public at large.
- This requires a climate of transparency and data sharing that allows for public scrutiny and a healthy debate.

Category: POLITY

1. Private space

Context:

The Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court has ruled that the mandatory provision of making public the names of people who want to get married under the Special Marriage Act invades their privacy and their liberty, and made such publishing optional.

Significance:

- According to the new order, if a couple gives it in writing that they do not want the notice publicised, the Marriage Officer can solemnise the marriage.
- The court said that mandatorily publishing a notice of the intended marriage and calling for objections violates the right to privacy.
- Many intercaste and inter-faith marriages have faced violent opposition from those acting in the name of community.
- It serves as a major irritant out of the way of couples wanting to marry against the wishes of their parents or their immediate community.

Read more about the [U.P. religious conversion ordinance](#).

Also, read the editorial [Personal choices, the Constitution's endurance](#).

2. Double ignominy

Context:

Outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump has entered the record books for being the only American President to be impeached twice.

Details:

- His first impeachment, in September 2019, was for "abuse of power" and "obstruction of justice" over his dealings with Ukraine and attempts by Congress to investigate the same, yet he survived in office owing to a Senate acquittal.

- The moment of dishonor came after the House of Representatives passed a motion of impeachment against him, this time for incitement of insurrection, following the assault on the U.S. Capitol building on January 6 by a violent pro-Trump mob.

Read more on the impeachment of the U.S President covered in [26th September 2019 CNA](#) and [20th December 2019 CNA](#).

F. Prelims Facts

1. Army Day

- On 15 January 1949, Field Marshal Kodandera M. Cariappa (then Lieutenant General), took over as the first Indian Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army from General Sir Francis Butcher (the last British person to hold that post).
- Every year, this day is celebrated as Army Day in India.

Read more on [Army Day](#)

G. Tidbits

1. World's largest vaccination programme begins today

What's in News?

The Prime Minister of India will flag off the first phase of the nationwide COVID-19 vaccination drive.

- Covishield and Covaxin vaccines have been delivered across the country.
 - The beneficiaries currently will not have a choice between the two vaccines.
- The world's largest vaccination programme will begin at a total of 3,006 session sites across all the States and the Union Territories, which will be connected virtually throughout the exercise.
 - It has been planned in a phased manner after identifying the priority groups.
 - Healthcare workers, both in the government and private sectors, including Integrated Child Development Services workers, will receive the vaccine in the first phase.
- A dedicated 24x7 call centre — 1075 — has been set up to address queries related to the pandemic and the vaccine roll-out.
- The CoWin platform will facilitate real-time information of vaccine stocks, storage temperature and individualized tracking of beneficiaries for COVID-19 vaccine.

Read more on [CoWin](#).

2. Army inks \$20 mn deal with ideaForge for UAV

What's in News?

The Indian Army has signed a \$20-million contract with ideaForge to procure undisclosed quantities of a high-altitude variant of SWITCH UAV.

- ideaForge is a player in unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology.

Details:

- SWITCH UAV is an indigenous system used in surveillance operations.
- It is built to cater to the most demanding surveillance operations of the Indian forces.
- The fixed-wing vertical take-off and landing UAV can be deployed at high altitudes and under harsh environments for day and night surveillance.
- ideaForge has been awarded this one-year contract marking a strategic shift in the Indian defence procurement process.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Nagi and Nakti bird sanctuaries are located in which state?

- a. Bihar
- b. Uttar Pradesh
- c. Odisha
- d. Madhya Pradesh

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The Nagi and Nakti bird sanctuaries are two sanctuaries in Bihar, so close to each other that they can be taken as one bird area.
- Nagi is 7 km from Jhajha in the Jamui District, and Nakti is a further 4 km from Nagi, occupying similar habitat.
- Bihar's first state-level bird festival 'Kalrav' will be held at the world-famous Nagi-Nakti bird sanctuaries from January 15, 2021.

Q2. Consider the following statements about Open Skies Treaty:

1. It is an agreement that allows the signatory-countries to monitor arms development by conducting unarmed surveillance flights over each others' territories.
2. The surveillance flights can collect data on military forces and activities.
3. India is a member of this treaty.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Signed in 1992, the Open Skies Treaty permits each state-party to conduct short-notice, unarmed, reconnaissance flights over the others' entire territories to collect data on military forces and activities.
- It is an agreement that allows the signatory-countries to monitor arms development by conducting unarmed surveillance flights over each others' territories.
- India is not a member of this treaty.

Q3. Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty covered which of the following types of missiles?

1. Intermediate-range land-based missiles carrying nuclear warheads
2. Medium-range land-based missiles carrying nuclear warheads
3. Nuclear sea-launched missiles

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty was a nuclear arms-control accord reached by the United States and the Soviet Union in 1987 in which the two nations agreed to eliminate their stocks of intermediate-range and shorter-range (or "medium-range") land-based missiles which could carry nuclear warheads.
- It also covered all land-based missiles, including those carrying nuclear warheads but did not cover sea-launched missiles.
- The United States withdrew from the Treaty on 2nd August 2019.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is a statutory body of the Ministry of Women & Child Development.
2. CARA monitors and regulates both in-country and inter-country adoptions.
3. India has ratified the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

All the statements are correct.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. What is the Open Skies Treaty? With the introduction of modern drones & satellites, has the treaty outlived its utility? (15 Marks, 250 Words) [GS 2, International Relations].
2. In the backdrop of the roll out of world's largest COVID-19 vaccination programme in India discuss the key regulatory challenges and measures essential in achieving vaccine confidence. (15 Marks, 250 Words) [GS 2 Health].