

## 17 Jan 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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## B. GS 2 Related

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. WHO – Between public health and global politics

##### Context:

- The World Health Organisation has been leading the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic from the front has been subject to both recognition and criticism

##### WHO genesis

- WHO was established in the year 1948 with 61 members on board.
- The goal of WHO was to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable.
- The WHO got off on a positive note, with the organization playing a pivotal role in eliminating smallpox from the world. WHO's work on malaria and neglected tropical diseases, among others, is well appreciated.
- Global organizations are often at the mercy of the constituent countries, it cannot be more powerful than what the funding countries would allow it to be.
- Case in point being the former US President Donald Trump announcement to halt the funding the US provides to WHO, he reasoned it by saying the WHO was mismanaging the spread.
- This announcement came at a time when the global caseload had approached 2 million, including over 1 lakh deaths; the US has seen the most cases (over 6 lakh) and deaths (over 26,000).

##### COVID-19 scenario

- The focus of attention was on the World Health Organization (WHO) and its efforts to tackle the global health crisis with the onset of COVID-19 pandemic.
- It is funded by a large number of countries, philanthropic organisations, United Nations organisations etc
- The countries or member states pay their assessed contributions (countries' membership dues), and voluntary contributions from member states and other partners.
- The WHO has seen a lot of ups and downs ever since it came into existence and faced a lot of criticism, the scrutiny it has been subjected to has been intense during the COVID-19 era.
- However, its relevance is underscored when it is consistently called upon by countries to help tide over the pandemic.
- WHO possess an army of specialists and access to information and best practices across the world, it remains the world's best chance not only to write out prescriptions but also maintain a vigil over inequities and access to health care services.
- WHO vision is to promote health, keep the world safe, and serve the vulnerable. Its goal is to ensure that a billion more people have universal health coverage, to protect a billion more people from health emergencies, and provide a further billion people with better health and well-being.

- Universal health coverage and health emergencies continue to be its two-pronged focus areas. The WHO works through its country offices that report to six regional offices.

### **Immunisation drive.**

- WHO enjoyed considerable success in overseeing smallpox elimination and that was based on its efforts to intensify the immunisation campaign globally.
- Smallpox, a disease caused by a virus, was one of the most devastating diseases known to humanity before it was eradicated.
- Edward Jenner had developed a vaccine way back in 1796, but vaccination received a boost with the WHO prioritising immunisation.
- Smallpox is an example that underlines the importance of the organization in furthering global health. Its work on malaria, and neglected tropical diseases, among others, also are recognised.
- The failure of WHO to anticipate and identify Ebola in the 1990s, and delayed response to HIV/AIDS, prompted the WHO to roll out the Global Public Health Intelligence Network in 1997, to predict potential epidemics using the information on the Internet, and function as an early warning alert.
- With the growing use of the Internet, such a system gains better traction, and in 2000, it was supplemented with the Global Outbreak Alert Response Network (GOARN).
- The criticism that has been meted out to WHO with regards handling of COVID-19 has been on incidences, like the WHO's Director-General saying that it was early to declare a public health emergency of international concern and then a week later, the WHO declared a public health emergency of international concern, the highest level of alarm. The world had at that point of time had 98 cases and with no casualties in 18 countries outside China. Four countries had evidence (eight cases) of human-to-human transmission outside China.
- Another incident was the WHO going on record saying that it does not recommend any broader restrictions on travel or trade and just recommend exit screening at airports as part of a comprehensive set of containment measures.
- And the WHO Director General's lavish praise for China in handling the crisis also came in for criticism, especially when Wuhan was the epicentre of the crisis and yet it took so long for China to report it and it still was not very transparent about the disease and its spread.
- Later, changing statements on the use of masks, hydroxychloroquine and even the mode of transmission, by the WHO, has raised eyebrows about their competency.
- However, the criticism may sound justified, but it has to be taken into account the nature of the functioning of the WHO and the nature of the beast, or the virus, in this case.
- The WHO works with information shared with it by nations, China, in this case. It is bound by these limitations, as also its innate inability to police nations or have them conform with recommendations.
- Representatives of the WHO also repeatedly mentioned, in their defence, that they were guided by scientific principles, backed by solid evidence, and in an evolving epidemic, instructions must necessarily be dynamic.
- The WHO issued a consolidated package in march when the cases were proliferating across the globe, guidelines covering the preparedness, readiness and response actions for four different transmission scenarios: no cases, sporadic cases, clusters of cases and community transmission.

- It deployed its human resources, the huge body of accumulated knowledge to aid the world handle its most unprecedented health crises of all time.

### **Solidarity trial**

- The WHO and its partners launched the SOLIDARITY trial, an international clinical trial that aims to generate robust data from around the world to find the most effective treatments for COVID-19.
- It was designed to accelerate the process of conducting randomised clinical trials which normally take years to design, conduct, and see the results of.
- The organisation also worked with the European Commission and multiple partners to launch the ACT Accelerator, to ensure that once a vaccine is available, it's available to everyone — especially those who are at the greatest risk.

### **Conclusion**

- The battle against COVID-19 is still ongoing, while vaccination has begun, challenges continue in monitoring this massive immunisation exercise, and ensuring that everyone has access to the recommended doses.
- The WHO will also have the responsibility to counter the fatigue that has set in after prolonged efforts to test, quarantine and treat COVID-19.
- This is a very critical juncture in the fight against the pandemic as the health workers are stretched and oxygen supplies are fast depleting and currently at a dangerously low level in some countries.
- The COVID-19 pandemic that has over 93 million cases and over 2 million deaths so far might just have cemented the role, relevance of the body.

## **Category: HEALTH**

### **1. Vaccines safe, ignore rumours, says PM**

#### **Context:**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the countrywide COVID-19 vaccination drive.

#### **Details:**

- As the vaccination drive against the Covid-19 pandemic commenced in India, the PM has expressed assurity over India-made vaccines and asked people not to heed to rumours.
- He extended congratulations to all Indians and the country's scientists who have had to deal with the pandemic.

#### **The vaccination drive**

- The Prime Minister noted that the vaccination drive in India is unprecedented and the world had not seen a vaccination drive of this scale, and India's response to the pandemic had been an example for other countries to emulate.
- The vaccines have come about in the shortest time span and this is an achievement for India and its contribution towards the battle against COVID-19.

- The scale of the vaccination drive has been appreciable, the first phase will see inoculation of three crore healthcare and frontline workers, and in the next step, it is expected to take the number to 30 crores.
- There are only three countries in the world with more than 30 crore population: India, the U.S. and China. Hence, this is going to be the biggest vaccination drive.

#### **Much cheaper**

- Indian vaccines are available at a more affordable price than foreign ones and easier and more conducive to India's conditions.
- Pfizer storage temperature is minus 70 degrees Celsius, which is colder than winter in Antarctica. Moderna vaccine needs to be frozen too, but at a temperature of minus 20 degrees Celsius more like a regular freezer.
- Another important point put across by the PM was that around 60% of children of the world would get vaccines manufactured in India, underlining the trust the world has on India's vaccine science and research.

#### **No room for complacency**

- The PM cautioned the beneficiaries against lowering the guard after getting the vaccine shot. People should not forget that the vaccines comprised two shots and had a gap of close to a month between them.
- The vaccine begins to take effect 14 days after the complete round is finished, thus no room for lowering the guard during or after vaccination, the use of mask and social distancing norms are essential in the fight against the virus.
- There are some rumours, unverified news about the efficacy and safety of vaccines, but the vaccines have been introduced after trials and dry runs, therefore, people should not heed to rumours.

#### **A congratulatory message to health workers**

- The health workers have at the forefront in the fight against the virus, they fought for every single life.
- The health workers have sacrificed a lot, they had to endure weeks without meeting their families.

#### **Conclusion**

- By according priority to the healthcare workers in the vaccination programme, it is a token of appreciation and gratitude towards the healthcare workers.

## **C. GS 3 Related**

### **Category: CONSERVATION**

#### **1. Migratory birds flock to Punjab wetland**

#### **Context:**

- Winter migratory waterbirds using the central Asian flyway have started making a beeline to Punjab's Harike wetland, offering a delight for bird lovers.

#### Details:

- Harike wetland has been host to birds such as the Eurasian coot, greylag goose, bar-headed goose, gadwall and the northern shoveler.
- Among others species, common pochard, spot-billed duck, little cormorant, pied avocet, great cormorant, ferruginous pochard and common teal have been spotted with regularity.
- On average, the number has been ranging between 92,000 and 94,000 over the years. The average number has been stable.
- However, the number of some species, including northern lapwing, Pacific golden plover, black-bellied tern and cotton pygmy goose, has witnessed a decline.

## **Category: POLLUTION**

### **1. Gujarat rivers remain highly polluted**

#### Context:

- The unchecked flow of untreated industrial effluent into rivers in Gujarat has led to increasing pollution in the Sabarmati, Mahisagar, Narmada, Vishwamitri and Bhadar.

#### Details:

- The Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) data suggests that the Sabarmati river is among the most polluted rivers in the country.
- Gujarat is ranked fourth among the top five States with highly polluted rivers, with as many as 20 rivers in the critically polluted category.

#### River Sabarmathi

- A thick froth on the Mahisagar witnessed recently has raised alarms, prompting the Gujarat Pollution Control Board (GPCB) to constitute a high-level committee to study the rising level of pollution in the river.
- Pollution in rivers has emerged as a major threat in the last few years, largely because of the callous approach of the authorities, this attitude has emboldened the industries to discharge untreated effluents into flowing rivers without any punitive measures.
- There have numerous pieces of evidence of treated and untreated effluent being released into the estuary of the Mahisagar and Gulf of Cambay, flouting the guidelines of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB).
- As per the official parameters, if the chemical oxygen demand (COD), which indicates organic pollutant load, is higher than 250 mg per litre, then it should not be released into the rivers.
- Most of the Gujarat rivers where the effluents are dumped into, the COD level is in the range of 700 to 1000 mg per litre. While Dissolved Oxygen (DO) level parameter, which is an indicator of the



health of a river in perennial rivers like Mahisgar should be in the range of 6 to 8 mg per litre, it is actually below 2.9 mg per litre.

- The Gujarat State government has come with a proposal of a ₹2,300 crore project for a deep-sea effluent disposal pipeline to cater to nearly 4,500 industrial units. The project will serve four highly industrialised districts (Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Kheda and Rajkot), which are the main sources of pollution.

### **Conclusion:**

- While effluents continue to be dumped in Sabarmati and Mahisagar, there is a need to enforce effluent standards by the local authorities as untreated hazardous effluents will threaten the survival of the river and its associated biodiversity, on a long term, it will have consequences on human health as well.

## **Category: ECONOMY**

### **1. Refine quality of expenditure to aid fiscal sustainability**

#### **Context:**

- The RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das has called for maintaining and improving the quality of expenditure to address the objectives of fiscal sustainability while supporting growth.

#### **Details:**

- The International Monetary Fund's calculations have suggested that the total fiscal support in response to COVID-19 amounted to about 12% of global GDP by mid-September 2020.
- The RBI Governor said that the Global public debt appears to have reached 100% of GDP in 2020, this precarious situation has led to economies sitting on higher deficits and debt vulnerabilities.
- He opined that the current situation does not warrant severe austerity measure, he believes that breaching of fiscal targets should not signal cutting down on public expenditure on welfare activities of the government.

#### **'Multiplier effect'**

- He talked about how expenditure on physical and social infrastructure including human capital, science and technology will not just be limited to welfare-enhancing but will lead to higher growth through their higher multiplier effect and enhancement of both capital and labour productivity.

#### **In future**

- He opined that going forward, it becomes necessary to look beyond just statistics and numerical targets, he underlined the need to look at fiscal road maps more broadly and not be restricted by numbers in the form of quantitative parameters like fiscal balance to GDP ratio or debt to GDP ratio, but also in terms of measurable parameters relating to the quality of expenditure, both for the Centre and States.
- The conventional parameters of fiscal discipline will ensure medium- and long-term sustainability of public finances, while measurable parameters of quality of expenditure would ensure that welfarism carries significant productive outcomes and multiplier effects.

### RBI role during the pandemic

- The principal objective of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) during the pandemic was to support economic activity as the strict enforcement of the lockdown brought economy to a standstill and also ushered in a lot of pessimism in the economy.
- He said that the role RBI was accentuated with the pandemic and it was important that the central bank policies aimed at easing the severity of the economic impact of the pandemic.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: HEALTH

#### 1. The sustained fight against trans fats

##### Context:

- The [Food Safety and Standards Authority of India \(FSSAI\)](#) reduced the permissible limit of trans fatty acids (TFA) in oils and fats to 3% for 2021 and 2% by 2022, against the earlier cap of 5%.
- <https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/upsc-exam-comprehensive-news-analysis-jan04-2021/#FSSAI%20slashes%20limit%20for%20transfat%20levels%20in%20foods>

##### Details:

- In 2018, the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) had called for global elimination of industrially produced TFAs by 2023.
- An amendment was carried out to the Food Safety and Standards (Prohibition and Restriction on Sales) Regulations to make way for new rules
- The new rules are made applicable to the edible refined oils, vanaspati (partially hydrogenated oils), margarine, bakery shortenings, and other cooking media like vegetable fat spreads and mixed fat spreads.
- In 2018, the World Health Organization (WHO) had called for global elimination of industrially produced TFAs by 2023.

##### What are trans fats and why are they harmful?

- All natural fats and oils are a combination of monounsaturated, polyunsaturated and saturated fatty acids or trans fatty acids.
- The human body requirements are met by the first two categories of 'healthy' fats as apart from being a major source of energy, they aid absorbing some vitamins and minerals and build cell membranes and the sheaths surrounding nerves.
- These fats are free-flowing, unlike saturated fatty acids or trans fats, which are considered harmful as they clog arteries and result in hypertension, heart attacks, and other cardiovascular issues.
- There are two broad types of trans fats found in foods:



- naturally-occurring and
  - artificial trans fats.
- Artificial trans fats are considered harmful for human health and are cause for many cardiovascular related deaths
  - Artificial trans fats are created through an industrial process that adds hydrogen to liquid vegetable oils to make them more solid, enhance their shelf life, and for use as an adulterant as they are cheap.
  - They are widely found in baked and fried foods as well as adulterated ghee, which becomes solid at room temperature.
  - Cardiovascular diseases are the leading cause of death globally, causing over 1.8 crore deaths every year.
  - The WHO data suggests that in excess of 5 lakh people with cardiovascular issues die globally every year due to the consumption of industrially produced TFAs. As per FSSAI, about 77,000 deaths take place annually in India due to TFAs.

#### **How did India and other nations start acting on it?**

- Citing adverse health impacts, the global health body in 2018, called for the elimination of industrially produced TFAs by 2023 and issued a detailed step-by-step guide called 'REPLACE' to help countries frame policies.
- This brought in much needed focus and attention to the issue, it prompted and encouraged countries to take accelerated action.
- The threats emanating from non-communicable diseases is not a new one, it began gaining attention several decades back, dating back to the 80s decade.
- Denmark became the first country to ban TFAs in 2003 and this novel step seemed to inspire other countries to tread on a similar path with Chile and Switzerland banned TFAs too in the following five years.
- The several U.S. States, such as New York, implemented local bans on the consumption of TFAs.
- The WHO released a report in 2020 detailing the highlighting the countries that have taken up stringent measures to protect their population.
- The report said that close to 58 countries had introduced laws that will protect 3.2 billion people from TFAs by the end of 2021, but on a flip-side, there are more than 100 countries who have chosen to do very little to deal with this challenge. still needed to take action.
- 2020 saw an alarming 11 of the 15 countries that account for two-thirds of deaths linked to trans fats still needed to act, the countries were Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Iran, Mexico, Nepal, Pakistan, Republic of Korea.
- In India, action against trans fats coincided with the setting up of the FSSAI. Though it came into existence in 2006, civil society organisations say that its functioning picked up by 2011-12. It was in 2011 that it imposed a cap of 10% on trans fats in oils and fats in India, which was further revised to 5% in 2015.

#### **What next?**

- There have been numerous Civil society organisations in India who are pushing for a cap of 3% for 2021 and 2% for 2022 to be imposed not just on trans fats in oils and fats, but in “all” foods.
- However ennobling the legislation and rules are, the problem lies in the implementation and the fact that this falls under the state subject.
- The FSSAI will need to pursue local governments to improve surveillance, an inspection of food premises, sampling of food products, regular training of officers, upgradation of food labs, etc., which are also among concerns raised by a Parliamentary panel on the regulator’s ineffectiveness.

## Category: POLITY

### 1. Can courts stay laws made by the legislature?

#### Context:

- The decision to stay the implementation of the controversial farm laws by the Supreme Court and going ahead with the appointment of a committee to examine the contentious issues between agitating farmers and the Union government has been met with criticism.

#### Details:

- The farm laws have become a bone of contention between the agitating farmers and the Union Government, the farmer protests do not look like it is going to end soon.
- The SC while choosing to stay the implementation rejected the arguments of the Attorney General that laws made by the legislature should not be ordinarily stayed, as there is a presumption of constitutionality in favour of the laws, this rare exercise of staying the laws has attracted attention from the legal luminaries.

#### How did the SC justify its order on farm laws?

- The bench noted that the court is well within its powers to grant a stay of any executive action under a statutory enactment.
- The court’s justification implies that it was apparently making a distinction between staying a law and staying its implementation or any action under it.
- Some may argue, however, that the effect remains the same, as the order operates as a stay on the government invoking its provisions.
- The court chose to cite precedent in the order passed by another Bench of the Supreme Court on the Maratha reservation issue.
- The SC bench in this issue directed that the admissions to educational institutions for 2020-21 and appointments to posts under the government shall be made without reference to the reservation provided under the relevant legislation. The matter has been referred to a Constitution Bench.
- However, in the Maratha reservation case, the Bench said interim orders could be passed if an enactment is ex facie unconstitutional or contrary to the law laid down by the Supreme Court.

- It noted that the quota violated the 50% ceiling mentioned in the Indra Sawhney case (1992) and that the Maharashtra government had not shown any extraordinary situation to justify exceeding the limit.
- The Supreme Court has further reasoned that by staying the implementation, the farmers may be encouraged to be a part of a negotiating process with the government.

#### **What are the court's powers in regard to staying enacted law?**

- Judicial Review is the power of Courts to pronounce upon the constitutionality of legislative and executive acts of the government which fall within their normal jurisdiction.
- The scope of judicial review before Indian courts has emerged in three dimensions
  - *firstly*, to establish fairness in administrative action,
  - *secondly*, to protect the guaranteed constitutional fundamental rights and
  - *lastly*, to rule on questions of legislative competence between the centre and the states.
- However, interim orders staying or suspending laws enacted by the legislature are not accepted well by constitutional courts and legal scholars.
- The general argument is that unless there are well-established reasons such as flagrant lack of constitutional validity, or absence of legislative competence, a law ought not to be stayed.

#### **Why is it considered unusual for a court to suspend a law or its operation?**

- It is pointed out that by suspending a law, the judiciary is upsetting the concept of separation of powers.
- Courts are expected to keep good faith in the legislature's wisdom at the threshold of a legal challenge to the validity of a law, the benefit of the doubt shall favour the competent legislature.
- The validity of law ought to be considered normally only at the time of final adjudication, and not at the initial stage.
- The second principle is the 'Law of Presumption', that there is a presumption that every law enacted by any legislature is constitutional and valid.
- The burden of proof lies on the party challenging it, therefore, courts are cautious when hearing petitions seeking suspension of law pending a detailed adjudication.

#### **What precedents are cited against judicial interference at an interim stage?**

- Case law indicates that in some cases, High Courts indeed stayed the operation of some laws. However, the Supreme Court took a dim view.
- In 1984, the Supreme court set aside an interim stay granted against the operation of a municipal tax (Siliguri Municipality & Others vs Amalendu Das & Others);
- In 2013, the Supreme Court chose to withdraw the stay on some provisions of and regulations under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products (Prohibition of Advertisement and Regulation of Trade and Commerce, Production, Supply and Distribution) Act, 2003 (Health for Millions Trust vs Union of India).

- In the Cigarettes and tobacco case, the court opined that the operation of statutory provisions cannot be impeded by granting an interim order except in cases where the Court is convinced beyond doubt that the particular enactment of the rules are unconstitutional and the factors, like, balance of convenience, irreparable injury and public interest are in favour of passing an interim order.
- Supreme Court criticized some High Courts for issuing stay orders while upholding the validity of Section 45S of the Reserve Bank of India Act, which imposed restrictions on unincorporated bodies accepting public deposits.
- SC opined that while considering staying of legislation, the courts must bear in mind that unless the provisions are evidently unjust or glaringly unconstitutional, the courts must exercise judicial restraint in staying the applicability of the same.

## F. Prelims Facts

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## G. Tidbits

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

**Q1. Consider the following**

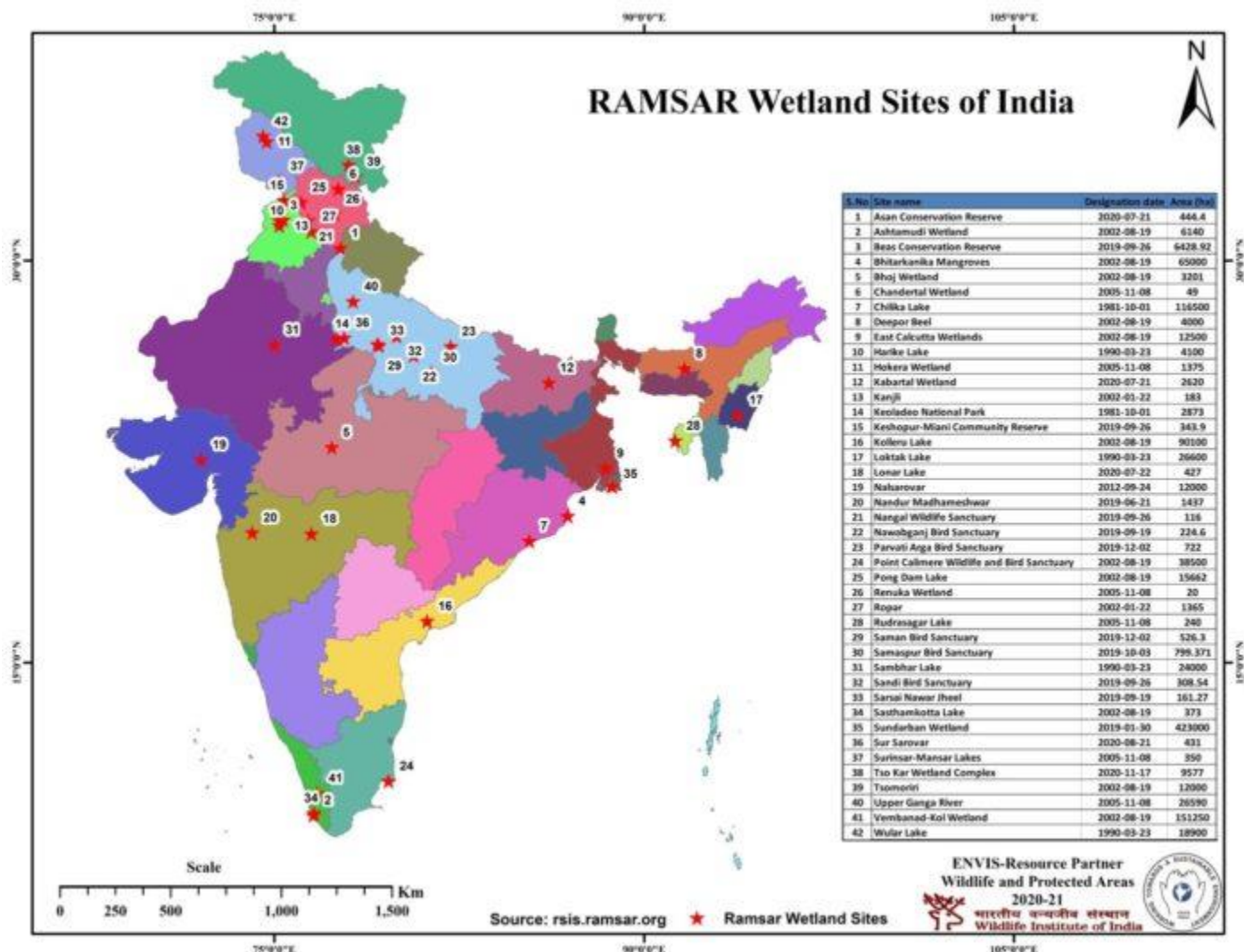
1. Hokera wetland: Punjab
2. Harike wetland: Assam
3. Kanjili wetland: Kerala
4. Rudrasagar wetland: Chattisgarh

**Which of the following are correctly matched?**

- a. I, III and IV.
- b. II and III.
- c. All of the above
- d. None of the above

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**



Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), statutory organisation, was constituted under the Environment Protection Act 1986.
2. Advise the Central Government on any matter concerning prevention and control of water and air pollution and improvement of the quality of air.

Which of the following statements are correct?

1. I only
2. II only
3. Both I and II.
4. Neither I nor II.

Answer: b



**Explanation:**

- A. The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), statutory organisation, was constituted in September, 1974 under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974. Further, CPCB was entrusted with the powers and functions under the Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981.
- B. Functions of the Central Board at the National Level
- Advise the Central Government on any matter concerning prevention and control of water and air pollution and improvement of the quality of air.
  - Plan and cause to be executed a nation-wide programme for the prevention, control or abatement of water and air pollution;
  - Co-ordinate the activities of the State Board and resolve disputes among them;
  - Provide technical assistance and guidance to the State Boards, carry out and sponsor investigation and research relating to problems of water and air pollution, and for their prevention, control or abatement;
  - Plan and organise training of persons engaged in programme on the prevention, control or abatement of water and air pollution;
  - Organise through mass media, a comprehensive mass awareness programme on the prevention, control or abatement of water and air pollution;
  - Collect, compile and publish technical and statistical data relating to water and air pollution and the measures devised for their effective prevention, control or abatement;
  - Prepare manuals, codes and guidelines relating to treatment and disposal of sewage and trade effluents as well as for stack gas cleaning devices, stacks and ducts;
  - Disseminate information in respect of matters relating to water and air pollution and their prevention and control.

**Q3. Consider the following statements**

1. The World Health Assembly is the decision-making body of WHO.
2. The Director-General of WHO is appointed by nations on a rotational basis.

**Which of the following statements are correct?**

- a. I only
- b. II only
- c. Both I and II.
- d. Neither I and II.

**Answer: a**

**Explanation:**

- The World Health Assembly is the decision-making body of WHO. It is attended by delegations from all WHO Member States and focuses on a specific health agenda prepared by the Executive Board.



- The main functions of the World Health Assembly are to determine the policies of the Organization, appoint the Director-General, supervise financial policies, and review and approve the proposed programme budget.
- The Health Assembly is held annually in Geneva, Switzerland.

**Q4. Gadwall, little cormorant and common teal, belong to**

- a. Reptiles
- b. Birds
- c. Primates
- d. Amphibians

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- Gadwall, little cormorant and common teal were spotted recently at the Harike wetlands.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Explain the doctrine of Separation of Powers and discuss the difference between Indian and the US model of separation of powers. (15 marks, 250 words).[GS-2,Polity]
2. "The discharge of untreated industrial effluents has contributed to deterioration in health of rivers", in the light of the above statement, highlight the steps to be taken to protect the health of rivers. (10 marks, 150 words)[GS-3,Pollution]