

20 Jan 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

B. GS 2 Related

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [SC panel lays out road map on farmers' issue](#)

HEALTH

1. [Punjab, T.N. register poor vaccination coverage](#)

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [India to fly out vaccines to neighbours](#)
2. [Military specialists to get S-400 training in Moscow](#)

C. GS 3 Related

ECONOMY

1. [SC upholds threshold for filing insolvency plea against realty developers](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

POLITY

1. [In bad faith](#)

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [India-Nepal relations in a new transition](#)

INTERNAL SECURITY

1. [The threat of deepfakes.](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. [Special Tiger Protection Force](#)

G. Tidbits

1. [Netaji's birth anniversary to be celebrated as 'Parakram Divas'](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. SC panel lays out road map on farmers' issue

Context:

The Supreme Court-appointed committee on farmers' issues has decided to meet the State governments and the State Agricultural Marketing Boards along with the farm unions and cooperatives to seek their views on the farm reform laws.

Background:

- The farm laws brought the farmers and the government to a confrontation. They have been protesting for months against the Centre's three farm laws.
- Recently, the Supreme Court stayed the implementation of three controversial farm laws and formed a four-member committee of experts to listen to the grievances of the farmers on the laws and the views of the government and make recommendations.

Read more on this topic covered in [13th January 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Category: HEALTH

1. Punjab, T.N. register poor vaccination coverage

Context:

According to the Health Ministry, Punjab, Puducherry and Tamil Nadu have registered low coverage of COVID-19 vaccination so far.

Details:

- In Punjab, only 27.6% of the beneficiaries have received the shot, in Puducherry and Tamil Nadu, the figures stood at 34.6% and 34.9%, respectively.
- At the other end of the spectrum are Lakshadweep (89.3%), Sikkim (85.7%), Odisha (82.6%), Telangana (81.1%), Arunachal Pradesh (75.4%), Uttar Pradesh (71.4%) and Rajasthan (71.3%).

Challenges:

- Vaccine hesitancy was also a challenge at the initiation of polio and measles vaccination drive.
- It must be addressed through dialogue and creation of awareness, ensuring that the concerns are cleared.

Read more on the challenges India could face in the Vaccination Drive, covered in [19th January 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

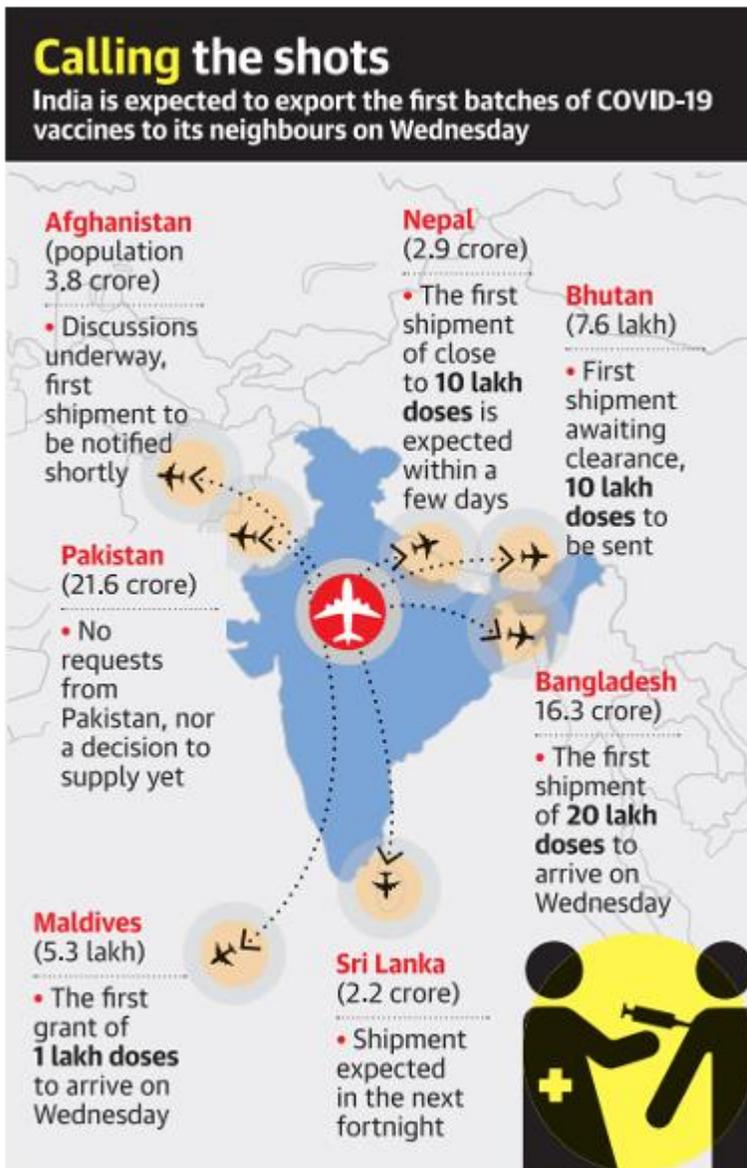
Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India to fly out vaccines to neighbours

Context:

India will begin to ship out lakhs of doses of the novel coronavirus vaccine to neighbouring countries.

Details:



- Announcing the shipments, the PM had said that India is deeply honoured to be a long-trusted partner in meeting the healthcare needs of the global community.

- The first batches are expected to reach Bhutan and the Maldives among several countries by special planes as a grant or gift.
- Shipments to Bhutan, the Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Seychelles have been confirmed, while those to Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Mauritius are awaiting necessary regulatory clearances.
- The only exception to India's regional vaccine diplomacy is Pakistan, that has neither requested nor is India discussing supplies to it at present.

Significance:

- The release of the shipments is part of the government's "Neighbourhood First" initiative.
- This will make India the first country to reach COVID-19 vaccines in South Asia, ahead of China (which has promised but not so far delivered), the World Health Organization and GAVI's vaccine alliance programme.

Read more on [GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance](#).

2. Military specialists to get S-400 training in Moscow

Context:

As India prepares to receive the first batch of S-400 long-range air defence system by the end of 2021, the first group of Indian military specialists are scheduled to depart for Moscow soon to undergo training courses on the S-400.

Background:

- In October 2018, India signed a \$5.43-billion deal with Russia for five S-400 Triumf regiments despite objections from the U.S. and the threat of sanctions under Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).
- S-400 supplies initiative is one of the flagship projects in the Russian-Indian military and military-technical cooperation.

Read more on [CAATSA and its relevance to India](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. SC upholds threshold for filing insolvency plea against realty developers

Context:

The Supreme Court upheld amendments in the [Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code](#) that prescribes that at least 100 allottees from the same real estate project should support the initiation of corporate insolvency resolution process in the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) against their property developer.

Background:

- The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Act of 2020 had introduced a threshold that required a minimum of 100 allottees, or 10% of the total allottees of a project, whichever was less, to jointly apply for corporate insolvency resolution in the [NCLT](#).
- The allottees should be from the same real estate project. Aggrieved allottees drawn from different projects of the same developer cannot form the 100.

Details:

- A third amendment had given a 30-day deadline for existing applicants to find the requisite number of supporters to meet the threshold of 100, else their plea pending in the tribunal even before the commencement of the 2020 Act would be deemed as withdrawn.
- Under the erstwhile regime, even a single allottee could initiate the corporate insolvency resolution process against his property developer. There was no need to garner support from other allottees.
- The court agreed with the legislature that having a single allottee approach the tribunal would be risky, considering that a corporate insolvency resolution may also entail a complete overhaul or replacement of the developer's company management.
- Such an initiative by a lone allottee would derail the plans of other allottees, who still had faith in the existing developer or were pursuing other legal remedies.

Read more on Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Act, 2020 covered in [13th March 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY

1. In bad faith

Context:

- The farmers' protest over the recently enacted farm acts has led to a confrontation between the farmer groups and the Government.
- The resolution between the two does not appear to be on the horizon soon.

Details:

- The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has summoned people associated with the ongoing farmers' agitation as 'witnesses' in a sedition case including farmers, shopkeepers, activists, and journalists from Punjab and Haryana.
- As per the NIA's FIR, large funds are being collected for propaganda against the government, these funds are also collected with the intention of funding demonstrations outside Indian missions overseas, including the USA, UK, Canada and Germany.
- The FIR has also claimed that these campaigns are being spearheaded by designated terrorists.

The summons notice

- The summons has been issued against a fresh case registered in December 2020 against Sikhs for Justice, a U.S.-based organisation that is banned by India. Others summoned include functionaries of Khalsa Aid, a Sikh charity that provided material support to agitating farmers, and those who organised a community kitchen for them.
- The issuing of summons notice appears to be a political move rather than a national security concern because it was issued on the back of statements made by certain leaders who linked the agitation to Khalistani separatism.
- The honourable Supreme Court was informed by the law officers of the government that certain anti-national forces have hijacked the protests and have misled the farmers.

Basis for issuing notice

- The purpose of the FIR has been to probe the activities of Sikh For Justice. This FIR will empower NIA to carry out a probe overseas as most of them are operating from the UK, USA, Canada and Germany.
- The FIR is based on the assumption that there is a clear conspiracy and a clear campaign against the Government of India from abroad, under the garb of running NGOs. While they are not banned there, in India they have been declared as terrorists.

Right move or a miscalculated step?

- The portrayal of critics of a government policy as either misled and ignorant or anti-national actors closes all doors for a possible honest dialogue with protestors.
- Several observers of these protests have called it a classic 'carrot and stick policy' with the government and the Court presenting a possible dialogue with protestors while agencies employ intimidatory measures against them.
- The calling out of protestors and tagging them as 'Anti-national' has been a predictable pattern. People questioning Government policies are subject to social media trolls, have questions raised over their loyalty to the country, all this in a bid to undermine the legitimacy of political actors opposed to the government.
- A very similar tale was witnessed during the agitations regarding Kashmir, Bhima Koregaon and during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act.
- The heavy-handed response and efforts to suppress dissent do not reflect well upon the democratic credentials of the country.

Diaspora angle

- The NIA's move will have repercussions in terms of impact on the Indian diaspora. The Sikh diaspora is a vibrant segment of the diaspora, having links with the motherland, and have contributed through donations to religious and charity activities. Other diaspora groups also support activities, including in the fields of education and health.
- The present regime at the central level has pursued a policy of harnessing the strength of Indian diaspora everywhere for national progress. Thus to consider any such community activity as anti-national warrants substantial proof and evidence.

Conclusion

- India is a functional democracy with adequate space for expressing political dissent, the fundamental rights enshrined in the Indian Constitution provides a legal basis for it. Thus the Government's stand to strong-arm dissenters should be avoided.
- The Government instead should pursue a dialogue with the protesters and keep an open communication line with them as State intimidation of protesting groups cannot serve as a substitute for political dialogue.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India-Nepal relations in a new transition

Context:

- Amidst the domestic political chaos that's being witnessed in Nepal, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Nepal visited New Delhi for the sixth meeting of the India-Nepal Joint Commission in January 2021, that was co-chaired by the External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

Details:

- Nepal's foreign policy choices are influenced by its internal political fundamentals, a unique characteristic.
- Nepal has witnessed political turmoil for years, the country's journey from absolute monarchy to multi-party democracy is a story of innumerable sacrifices and many revolts that were seldom peaceful.
- Political instability has been one of the key reasons behind the lack of progress on the domestic economy front and the poor infrastructure in Nepal.
- China's policy of enticing countries with poor economic and infrastructural status is not new, thus Nepal with its fragile democracy and the adulterated ideological standing of the ruling Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) offered China a possibility to achieve its geo-strategic objectives in South Asia.

The recent Nepal crisis

- The PM's call to dissolve the parliament when the house had two more years to serve has befuddled many. While the reason behind such a drastic move may not yet be known, it has surely plunged the infant democracy into yet another constitutional crisis.
- K.P. Oli has been criticized for putting his greed for power over the interests of democracy and political stability.
- Nepal's 2015 Constitution permits the dissolution of the House before its five-year term ends only if there is a hung assembly and no party manages to form a government.
- Since the President has cleared his recommendation, the issue will now be decided by the apex court.

Business as usual

- India and Nepal bilateral relations have seen a lot of setbacks in the last couple of years.

- The meeting between the external affairs ministers was largely centred around confidence-building measures such as,
 - Both sides expressed optimism on the progress achieved since the last meeting of the Joint Commission in furthering several bilateral initiatives, and the close cooperation between the two sides in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, an early provision of vaccines to Nepal was positively considered by India.
 - On the development partnership front, the expansion of the Motihari-Amlekhganj petroleum products pipelines to Chitwan and the establishment of a new pipeline on the eastern side connecting Siliguri to Jhapa in Nepal were actively discussed.
 - The upgraded first passenger railway line between India and Nepal from Jaynagar to Kurtha via Janakpur, the operating procedures for commencement of train services was discussed.
 - Other cross-border rail connectivity projects, including a possible Raxaul-Kathmandu broad gauge railway line, was part of the talks.

Projects on the anvil

- The Joint Commission has continued to underline the importance of the need for facilitating the cross-border movement of people and goods.
- The Integrated Check Posts (ICPs) at Birgunj and Biratnagar, which have been recently thrown open for operation have contributed immensely in aiding the seamless movement of people and trade between the two countries.
- The construction of a third integrated check post at Nepalgunj has already begun and this would be followed up by another integrated check post at Bhairahwa.
- The geography of Nepal renders it to be heavily reliant upon India's seaports for trading, and goods are transported by road, and the integrated check posts are expected to ease trade and transit.
- The joint hydropower projects, including the proposed Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project, should get rolling following this round of meeting.
- India's support to two more cultural heritage projects in Nepal, namely, the Pashupatinath Riverfront Development and the Bhandarkhal Garden Restoration in Patan Durbar is significant in the times when China is exploring all avenues to disrupt Nepal's natural choice in policy-making.
- Nepal has chosen to put its weight behind India's quest for a seat at the permanent membership table of an expanded UN Security Council (UNSC) to reflect the changed balance of power.
- The next meeting of the Joint Commission in Nepal should be crucial in giving a new direction to the bilateral ties, keeping a balance between change and continuity.

Stirrings for change

- Despite the Nepali side's demand to include the boundary in the Joint Commission Meeting, India has been firm on finding a fresh mechanism to resolve any such crucial long-pending issue.
- Nepal's transition from being a monarchy to a republic occurred about a decade ago, this was expected to usher in a new era in Nepal's political landscape.
- However, there is a growing disenchantment among the Nepali masses over a number of issues like the growing centralisation of power, failure of the Provincial System in meeting the developmental

aspirations, exploitation of a constitutional position to further political ambitions, case in point being the misuse of Presidential authority, and unprecedented corruption – all these provide ample room for a re-setting of Nepal's democracy.

- Increased frustration with the current political dispensation has paved way for a large section of the people expressing their desire for a 'cultural Monarchy' to be back to substitute the Presidential system and a re-establishment of certain traditional ways of governance.
- While unusual developments are taking place in Nepal, there are many who still think that India is comfortable with some changes as its Nepal policy is heading very clearly towards a deeper engagement with all sections.

Political flux in Nepal

- The visit of Nepal's Foreign Minister to New Delhi has come at a very crucial phase, previously in the last few months, Mr Oli was playing hard-ball with New Delhi, trying to dictate the terms of engagement with India by placing conditions.
- However, the times have slowly changed, the current political climate in Nepal does not favour the incumbent regime, the possibility of tiding through the crisis looks bleak, forcing Mr Oli to be receptive towards unexpected changes.
- This appears to be a proven tactic followed by Mr Oli, as one of the key centres of the pro-monarchy agitation is his constituency in eastern Nepal, Jhapa. In the time of transition, his outreach to India is being seen in such contexts.
- Amidst the political turmoil in Nepal, he is believed to be garnering support from different quarters including India; his China connection has been artificial and not yielded dividends as he had imagined.
- It is equally true that he has failed China too at times; by breaking even the cosmetic 'Communist unity' in Nepal, he has finally made China's hyper-interventionism a wasted effort.

Conclusion:

- Democracy in Nepal is achieved, not ascribed, and the people of Nepal deserve a functional political system that caters to their aspirations than what has been offered now under the Oli-Bhandari regime.
- Similar to what has been observed in other democracies around the world, Nepal's democracy has been affected with an extreme rise in majoritarian sentiments.
- Nepal can ill-afford to witness another phase of political instability because such a turn of events will not only damage its domestic aspirations but also its foreign policy objectives.

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. The threat of deepfakes.

Context:

- The protests at the Capitol Hill in the US was largely driven by misinformation and disinformation regarding the US Presidential elections.

Details:

- The problem of deepfakes is a challenge to policymakers, as it has the potential to create false opinions, disrupt social harmony, threaten political systems, incite violence, etc.
- There is a need to develop AI-backed technological tools to detect the unreal.

Deepfakes

- Deepfakes — synthetic media, meaning media (including images, audio and video) that are either manipulated or wholly generated by Artificial Intelligence, even have the power to threaten the electoral outcome of the world's oldest democracy.
- Several social media platforms blocked President Donald Trump's accounts after the attack.

Fabricating content

- The all-pervading social media platforms that have created a medium for the spread of information and misinformation has come under the scanner.
- Deepfakes are an emerging challenge to the cyberworld, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is used for fabricating audios, videos and texts to portray real people saying and doing things they never did, or creating new images and videos. These are done so convincingly that it is difficult to separate the real from the fake ones.
- Detection of deepfakes can only be carried out by AI-generated tools. Deepfakes have immense potential to target anyone, anywhere, they are used to tarnish reputations, create mistrust, question facts, and spread propaganda.

Social media platforms

- The U.S. Senate summoned Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, Twitter's Jack Dorsey and Google's Sundar Pichai to find out what they are doing to tackle online misinformation, disinformation and fabricated content.
- The Senators expressed their concerns about the censorship and the spread of misinformation.
- Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996, a law which protects freedom of expression and innovation on the Internet says that no social media platform can be deemed as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.
- This Section seeks to treat the social media platforms as mere 'messengers' and 'facilitators', thereby absolving all liabilities on behalf of the platforms.
- The chief executives of the popular social media platforms have expressed the need for the legislation to moderate content, but industry watchers and some politicians do not agree, they are of the opinion that the law requires an amendment.

Indian scenario

- The increasing internet penetration and smartphone usage have meant that close to 700 million in India are internet users, thus the deepfake problem is a problem that needs to be addressed.
- Hitherto, there is no explicit legislation that deals with deepfakes, though there are some provisions in the Indian Penal Code that criminalise certain forms of online/social media content manipulation.

- Cybercrimes fall under the ambit of The Information Technology Act, 2000, but this law and the Information Technology Intermediary Guidelines (Amendment) Rules, 2018 are not capable to tackle manipulation of content on digital platforms.
- The Information Technology Intermediary Guidelines (Amendment) Rules, 2018 calls for social media platforms to take up the responsibility to take down illegal content. The guidelines require social platforms to exercise due diligence in dealing with illegal content.
- In 2018, the government proposed rules to curtail the misuse of social networks. Social media companies voluntarily took it upon themselves to take action against any violations during the 17th Lok Sabha elections in 2019.
- The Election Commission of India issued instructions on social media use during election campaigns.
- It is widely known how the political parties through their IT cells have used social media platforms like WhatsApp for pushing fake news and propaganda.

New tools

- There is a need to look into the prospect of drafting new legislation to tackle the emerging challenges in the cyber world as the old laws are inadequate.
- Existing laws fail in protecting individuals and entities against deepfakes. Only AI-generated tools can be effective in detection. As innovation in deepfakes gets better, AI-based automated tools must be invented accordingly.
- Blockchains offer a robust mechanism against many security threats and can be deployed to digitally sign and affirm the validity of a video or document. Even with the advancement of AI tools to tackle deepfakes, there is a need to educate media users about the claptraps of deepfakes.

Efforts to tackle deepfakes

- The University of Washington and Microsoft convened a workshop with experts to discuss how to prevent deepfake technology from adversely affecting the 2020 U.S. presidential election.
- The workshop identified six themes:
 - a. deepfakes must be contextualised within the broader framework of malicious manipulated media, computational propaganda and disinformation campaigns;
 - b. deepfakes cause multi-dimensional issues which require a collaborative, multi-stakeholder response that requires experts in every sector to find solutions;
 - c. detecting deepfakes is hard;
 - d. journalists need tools to scrutinise images, video and audio recordings for which they need training and resources;
 - e. policymakers must understand how deepfakes can threaten polity, society, economy, culture, individuals and communities; and
 - f. the idea that the mere existence of deepfakes causes enough distrust that any true evidence can be dismissed as a fake is a major concern that needs to be addressed.

Conclusion

- In today's day and age, fake news, misinformation are in myriad forms, therefore no single technology can resolve the problem in its entirety.
- As deepfakes evolve, AI-backed technological tools to detect and prevent them must also evolve to combat the threat it poses to the world.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Special Tiger Protection Force

- In 2008, the Govt of India announced the establishment of the 'Special Tiger Protection Force' (STPF) at the state level.
- The National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) in 2009-10 advised important tiger states to recruit and train special police personnel for patrolling the tiger reserves to protect the tigers, co-predators and prey animals as well as to protect habitats.
- Based on the one time grant of Rs. 50 crore provided to the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) for raising, arming and deploying a Special Tiger Protection Force, the proposal for the said force was approved by the competent authority for 13 tiger reserves.
- The STPF has been made operational in the States of Karnataka (Bandipur), Maharashtra (Pench, Tadoba-Andhari, Nawegaon-Nagzira, Melghat), Rajasthan (Ranthambhore), Odisha (Similipal) and Assam (Kaziranga), out of 13 initially selected tiger reserves, with 60% central assistance under the ongoing Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Project Tiger.

Also read: [Tiger conservation in India](#)

G. Tidbits

1. Netaji's birth anniversary to be celebrated as 'Parakram Divas'

What's in News?

The Union Culture Ministry announced that January 23rd, the birth anniversary of Subhas Chandra Bose, would be celebrated as "Parakram Divas"- day of courage, every year.

- In a notification, the Ministry said the government had decided to celebrate the 125th birth anniversary year starting from January 23, 2021, in a befitting manner at national and international levels.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA):

1. It is a United States federal law.
2. CAATSA includes sanctions against countries that engage in significant transactions with the Russian defence and intelligence sectors.
3. Sanctions have been imposed under the act on Iran, North Korea and Turkey.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

All the statements are correct.

Q2. Global Food Policy Report is published by:

- a. Food and Agriculture Organisation
- b. International Food Policy Research Institute
- c. United Nations Population Fund
- d. World Health Organization

Answer: b

Explanation:

Global Food Policy Report is the International Food Policy Research Institute's flagship report.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Subhas Chandra Bose:

- 1. He authored the book 'The Indian Struggle'.
- 2. The newspaper named 'Swaraj' was started by him.
- 3. He founded the Naujawan Bharat Sabha to promote revolution against British rule.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Subhas Chandra Bose authored the book 'The Indian Struggle' which covers the Indian independence movement from 1920 to 1942. The book was banned by the British government.
- He also started a newspaper called 'Swaraj'.

- Naujawan Bharat Sabha was founded in 1926 by Bhagat Singh.

Q4. Exercise Desert Knight-21 and Garuda are air exercises between which of the following countries?

1. India
2. France
3. Australia
4. Saudi Arabia

Choose the correct option:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 4 only
- c. 1, 2 and 3 only
- d. 1 and 3 only

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Exercise Desert King-21 is a bilateral air exercise between India and France.
- As part of Indo-French defence cooperation, Indian Air Force and French Air and Space Force have held six editions of Air Exercises named 'Garuda', the latest being in 2019 at Air Force Base Mont-de-Marsan, France.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Explain the relevance of the National Investigation Agency and also discuss the recent amendments made to the NIA Act 2008. (15 marks, 250 words). [GS-3, Security]
2. Discuss the major talking points between India and Nepal in the recent past. (15 marks, 250 words). [GS-2, International Relations]