

# 01 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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## B. GS 2 Related

### Category: GOVERNANCE

#### 1. Centre likely to postpone Census to 2022

##### Context:

- Reports of the Centre's plan to **push the 2021 Census to 2022**.

##### Background:

##### Census:

- Population Census is the total process of collecting, compiling, analyzing or otherwise disseminating demographic, economic and social data pertaining, at a specific time, to all persons in a country or a well-defined part of a country. As such, the census provides a snapshot of the country's population and housing at a given point of time.
- The census provides information on size, distribution and socio-economic, demographic and other characteristics of the country's population. The data collected through the census are used for administration, planning and policy making as well as management and evaluation of various programmes by the government, NGOs, researchers, commercial and private enterprises, etc.

##### Census history in India:

- **The census exercise first began in 1872 under British Viceroy Lord Mayo, however, the first complete census was taken in 1881 under the British Viceroy Ripon.**
- Since then the census is undertaken every 10 years.
- **The decennial Census of India has been conducted 15 times, as of 2011.**
- Post 1949, the census has been conducted by the **Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India** under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.
- All the censuses since 1951 were conducted under the 1948 Census of India Act. The last census was held in 2011, whilst the next will be held in 2021. The 2021 Census of India will be the 16th Indian Census.

##### Details:

- The plan to shift the census is on account of the pandemic.
  - The government has been fully occupied in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. First, it was the measures taken to deal with the pandemic and now the massive vaccination programme under way across the country.
- The Census exercise was to be conducted in two phases — House Listing and Housing Census and Population Enumeration. The first phase of the Census and the updating of the National Population Register (NPR) were initially to be rolled out in some States on April 1, 2020, but were postponed due to the pandemic.

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## 1. 'Foreign troops to stay in Afghanistan beyond May'

### Context:

- The [North Atlantic Treaty Organization's](#) stand on pull out of international troops from Afghanistan.

### Background:

#### U.S. Taliban deal:

- The U.S. administration under President Donald Trump had signed an agreement with the Taliban in early 2020 calling for the **withdrawal of all foreign troops by May 2021 in return for the Taliban fulfilling certain security guarantees**. The U.S. had been reducing the number of its troops in Afghanistan.
- The U.S. administration had also sidelined the NATO alliance and its role in the peace talks by directly engaging with the Taliban negotiators.

### Details:

- Senior NATO officials have stated that, there **would be no full withdrawal by allies by April-end**. This is indicative of the international troops' plan to stay in Afghanistan beyond the May deadline envisaged by the Taliban's deal with the U.S.
  - Around 10,000 troops, including Americans, are in Afghanistan.
- The withdrawal plans would be considered at the NATO meeting of Defence Ministers in February.
- NATO spokeswoman has made it clear that No NATO ally wants to stay in Afghanistan longer than necessary, however the withdrawal will only be condition based.

#### Continued violence in Afghanistan:

- The officials have argued that the conditions for full pullout have not been met.
  - Despite the ongoing peace talks between the Afghan government and the [Taliban](#), violence has remained high in the country.

#### Possible tweaks in U.S.'s Afghan policy:

- There are expectations that with the new U.S. administration, there will be tweaks in its Afghan policy.
- The sense of hasty withdrawal which was prevalent during the previous administration may make way for a much more calculated exit strategy.

### Concerns:

- This **move could escalate tensions with the Taliban** which has been demanding full withdrawal. This could adversely affect the deal reached with the Taliban.

## 2. India delivers 2 cranes for Chabahar

### Context:

- India handed over two 140-tonne cranes for loading and unloading equipment to the Iranian government as part of its **bilateral contract between India and Iran signed in May 2016 for \$85 million to equip and operationalise the Chabahar port.**

#### Details:

- This event, coming amid talks with Iranian authorities, **signals a push to the Chabahar port project, which was stalling due to the U.S. sanctions.** There were concerns over the downturn of ties between India and Iran.
- The delivery of the cranes shows India's commitment to the strategic connectivity of Chabahar port project that will **provide access to markets in Central Asia.**
- India plans to invest further in the port project, given the government's expectations of some **easing up in U.S. sanctions** in the upcoming months, once the new Biden administration begins to address its policy on re-entering the Iran nuclear deal.

#### India's push on the Chabahar project:

- The MEA delegation's visit to Iran comes a month after transport officials of India, Iran and Uzbekistan held their **first "Trilateral Working Group Meeting"** on the joint use of Chabahar Port.
- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) also plans to hold a **quadrilateral meeting in Delhi with officials from Afghanistan, Iran, Uzbekistan** and "another Central Asian countries as observers" to discuss Chabahar connectivity and transit trade opportunities.

## C. GS 3 Related

### Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

#### 1. A bullet through an island's heart

##### Context:

- The **NITI Aayog's 'Sustainable Development of Little Andaman Island – Vision Document'**, proposing to set up a megacity in the Little Andaman Island.

##### Details:

- The plan envisages **sustainable and holistic development** of the 680 sq km, Little Andaman Island in the Andaman and Nicobar group.
- The plan proposes the building of a **new greenfield coastal city** in the island, that will be developed as a **free trade zone**.
- The plan proposes three development zones:
  - Zone 1, planned along the east coast of Little Andaman, will be the financial district and medical city and will include an aerocity, and a tourism and hospital district.
  - Zone 2, spread over pristine forest, will house the leisure zone, will have a film city, a residential district and a tourism SEZ.
  - Zone 3, again spread over pristine forest zone will be a nature zone, further categorised into three districts: an exclusive forest resort, a nature healing district and a nature retreat, all on

the western coast. The nature resort complex is to have theme resorts, floating/underwater resorts, beach hotels, and high-end residential villas.

- Necessary infrastructure like an international airport, Greenfield ring road, mass rapid transit network, jetty has also been proposed.

#### **Significance of the proposal:**

- The proposal aims to leverage the **strategic location** and natural features of the island to ensure development in the islands.



- The location of the island and its development would **augur well for India's stand in the Indian Ocean region, which it considers as its zone of influence**. The document envisages developing the islands into "veritable jewels for the country".
- The Greenfield city could compete with the likes of Singapore and Hong Kong and emerge as an **alternative for business establishments**. This augurs well for the Indian economy.
- The infrastructural development could **aid employment generation** in the region. This could **stimulate the development process in the entire Andaman and Nicobar chain of islands**.

#### **'Blocks' to development:**

- There are certain factors that could act as impediments in the proposal to develop Little Andaman.

##### **Lack of connectivity:**

- Lack of good connectivity with the Indian mainland and global cities.

##### **Fragile biodiversity of the region:**

- **Fragile biodiversity and natural ecosystems** in the islands.
- 95% of Little Andaman is covered in forest, a large part of it the **pristine evergreen type**. Some 640 sq km of the island is Reserve Forest under the Indian Forest Act.

##### **Supreme Court notifications:**

- Supreme Court notifications pose an impediment to development in environmentally-vulnerable areas.

### Concerns:

#### Impact on the indigenous tribes of the island:

- There is a notable presence of indigenous tribes on the island. Nearly 450 sq km of the island area is protected as the **Onge Tribal Reserve**.
- The vision suggests the relocation of the tribals to other parts of the island if the need arises. The development process could therefore lead to their displacement and have an impact on their welfare.

#### Environmental impact:

- The plan has raised an alarm among conservationists. The regional forest department too has raised serious concerns over the ecological impact of the project considering the **ecological fragility of the region**.
- The vision needs around 35% of the island land area and the plan suggests **de-reserving 32% of the reserved forest** and de-notifying 138 sq km or 31% of the tribal reserve.
- The large diversion of forest land would lead to large scale deforestation and would hence have an adverse impact on the various wild animals that inhabit the area.
  - More than **2 million trees** stand in the forest land sought for these projects.
  - The western coast is one of the most important **nesting sites of the globally endangered Giant Leatherback sea turtle**.

#### Lack of environmental impact assessment:

- The plan has no inventorisation of forests and ecological wealth and **no details of any environment impact assessment**. This would handicap the ability to correctly assess the impact of the plan.

#### Geological vulnerability:

- The vision document fails to consider the geological vulnerability of the place, which was amongst the worst-affected in the **earthquake-tsunami** combination in 2004.

### Conclusion:

- The island serves as a **unique and rare socio-ecological-historical complex** of high importance and this needs to be factored in while planning the development of the island.

## D. GS 4 Related

*Nothing here for today!!!*

## E. Editorials

### Category: HEALTH

#### 1. Building a robust healthcare system

### Context:



- The article written by former health secretary to Tamil Nadu, R Poornalingam discusses the need to focus on a robust public healthcare system and suggests suitable measures in this direction.

### Background:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the importance of a strong public health system. There has been a growing emphasis on the need to revamp the public health system quickly so as to be better prepared to handle any similar emergencies in the future.

### Details:

#### High variation in health parameters among the states:

- The **efficacy of the public health system in India varies widely across the country** since it is a State subject.
- An analysis of certain health parameters such as Infant Mortality Rate, Maternal Mortality Ratio and Total Fertility Rate can indicate the variation of public health quality in the different states of India.

### Some key health parameters in select States

State	Infant Mortality Rate	Under Five Mortality	Maternal Mortality Ratio	Total Fertility Rate	% deliveries by untrained personnel
Bihar	32	37	149	3.2	19.0
M.P.	48	56	173	2.7	7.2
Rajasthan	37	40	164	2.5	1.6
U.P.	43	47	197	2.9	14.0
T.N.	15	17	63	1.6	0.2
Kerala	7	10	42	1.7	0.1
India	32	36	113	2.2	7.8

SOURCE: SRS DATA FOR 2018

- The **northern States are performing very poorly in the above vital health parameters.**
  - In Madhya Pradesh, the number of infant deaths for every 1,000 live births is as high as 48 compared to seven in Kerala.
  - In U.P. the Maternal Mortality Ratio is 197 compared to Kerala's 42 and Tamil Nadu's 63.
  - The percentage of deliveries by untrained personnel is very high in Bihar, 190 times that of Kerala.
  - Total Fertility Rate, is very high in Bihar (3.2) against the stabilisation rate of 2.1. Tamil Nadu and Kerala have done so well that their population will decline over the years.

### Concerns:

#### Poor health indicators:

- Some of these States are performing so poorly that they are comparable to the poorest countries in the world, pulling down the average for India.

#### India may fail to achieve SDG-3:

- India failed to achieve the earlier Millennium Development Goals because of the poor performance of the northern States.
- It is doubtful whether India will be able to achieve **Goal 3 (good health and well-being) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

#### Lack of accountability on the poorly performing states:

- There is no existing mechanism to hold the poorly performing states responsible and accountable for their performance.
- The State governments too themselves are indifferent to their poor performance.
- The poor performance has been despite the fact that **Finance Commissions have been pouring non-Plan funds into these States in addition to substantial Plan allocation from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for the Empowered Action Group States**. More money has not produced better results.

#### Wrong approach:

- The Central government seems to be satisfied with the **all India averages for the health parameters** which are somewhat reasonable thanks to the excellent performance of well-governed States.
- This is a **skewed approach given that the meaningful development would require equitable health opportunities for all**.

#### Accentuate the existing inequalities:

- The existing inequalities will only increase without equitable access to quality health and life opportunities for the people in the poorer states. Unless they give health the highest priority, rapid improvement is not possible.
- This would have a detrimental **impact on poverty** Example-the high TFR in states would lead to over population and can contribute to further poverty.
- **Inequal access to healthcare will only increase the wealth of the already wealthy and accentuate income disparity.**

#### Way forward:

##### Focusing on the low performing states:

- The governments — both at the Centre and the Empowered Action Group States — should take steps to bring these States on a par with the southern States.
- There is the need to hold the Empowered Action Group States accountable to the SDGs. They must be asked to reach the levels of the southern States within three to five years.

##### States to lead the efforts:



- Since **health is a State subject**, the primary onus lies with the State governments. Each State government must focus on public health and aim to improve the vital health indicators discussed above first.

#### Political will:

- An enlightened political leadership which is interested in the health and well-being of the people is the need of the hour. Persistent and focused efforts at the highest level of government are needed.
- When state governments are focused on health and the district health administrations are held accountable, performance is bound to improve.
- Only clear focus and better governance can help improve the public health system in India.

#### Focus on preventive health care:

- **Preventive public healthcare systems offer the most efficient and low cost, high impact intervention when it comes to the domain of healthcare in India.**
- The governments must focus on this strategy.

#### Primacy to public healthcare system:

- An important measure that can make a difference is a public health set-up in these States that **addresses primary and preventive health.**
- **Investing in health is the primary responsibility of any government.** The governments must give health its due importance through sufficient resource allocation.

## Category: INFRASTRUCTURE

### 1. The problem of ageing dams

#### Context:

- The article discusses the threat posed by the **ageing dams in India.**

#### Background:

- The report, titled '**Ageing water infrastructure: An emerging global risk**' and compiled by United Nations University's Canadian based Institute for Water, Environment and Health, says most of the 58,700 large dams worldwide were constructed between 1930 and 1970 with a design life of 50 to 100 years.

#### Details:

#### Ageing dams in India:

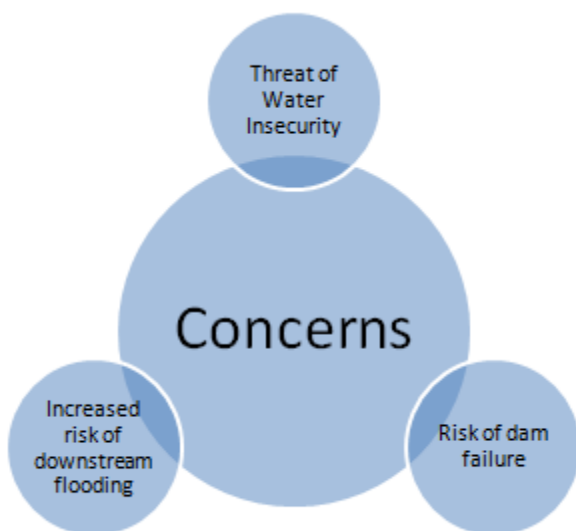
- Of the over 5,200 large dams built so far, about 1,100 large dams have already reached 50 years of age and some are older than 120 years.
- The number of such ageing dams will increase to 4,400 by 2050. This means that **80% of the nation's large dams face the prospect of becoming obsolete by 2050.**

- The situation of medium and minor dams is even more precarious as their shelf life is even lower than that of large dams.
- Ageing signs include increasing cases of dam failures, progressively increasing costs of dam repair and maintenance, increasing reservoir sedimentation, and loss of a dam's functionality and effectiveness.

#### **Siltation in Indian reservoirs:**

- As dams age, soil replaces the water in the reservoirs. This is technically known as silt or sediment.
- **Sedimentation leads to decrease in the storage capacity of dams.**
- The observed **siltation rate in India's dams has been substantially high**. Therefore, the storage space in Indian reservoirs is receding at a rate faster than anticipated. Reservoirs are poised to become extinct in less than a few decades.
- Studies show that the design of many of our reservoirs is flawed. Studies on reservoir sedimentation have shown that Indian reservoirs are designed with a poor understanding of sedimentation science. The designs underestimate the rate of siltation and overestimate live storage capacity created.

#### **Concerns/Consequences of ageing dams in India:**



#### **Water Insecurity:**

- This reduced storage capacity could have a detrimental impact on water security. This could have an **impact on not only related economic activities like agriculture but will also have other unwarranted environmental impacts**.
  - The reduced water availability will lead to lower water availability for agricultural activities. This could affect the crop yields severely and disrupt the farmer's income, as water is one of the crucial factors for crop yield.
  - It is worth noting that no plan on climate change adaptation like rain water harvesting will succeed with sediment-packed dams.

### Flooding risks:

- The high siltation rates in Indian dams reinforce the argument that the designed flood cushion within several reservoirs across many river basins may have already depleted substantially due to which **floods may become more frequent downstream of dams**.
  - The flooding of Bharuch in 2020, Kerala in 2018 and Chennai in 2015 are a few examples attributed to downstream releases from reservoirs.

### Risk of dam failure:

- Flooding, internal erosion, seepage, and structural instability and deterioration are among the reasons dams might fail. **Aging makes dams more vulnerable to these problems**.
- By 2050, most people on Earth will live downstream of tens of thousands of large dams built in the 20th century, many of them already operating at or beyond their design life.
- Dam failures can result in the loss of lives, livelihoods, and properties, as well as the loss of ecosystems and habitats, to flooding.
- Approximately 3.5 million people are at risk if **India's Mullaperiyar dam in Kerala**, built over 100 years ago, "were to fail".

### Way forward:

- India will have to find sufficient water in the 21st century to feed the rising population by 2050, grow abundant crops, create sustainable cities and ensure growth. In this regard, it is imperative for all stakeholders to come together to address the issue of ageing dams.

### Dam decommissioning:

- **Dam decommissioning should be seen as equally important as dam building** in the overall planning process on water storage infrastructure developments.
  - Public safety, escalating maintenance costs, reservoir sedimentation, and restoration of a natural river ecosystem are among the reasons driving dam decommissioning throughout the world.

### Alternative solutions to water security:

- There is also the need to consider other alternatives like **smaller dams and focus on groundwater recharge solutions** to address water security in India.

## F. Tidbits

### 1. GST mop-up for Jan. sees a new high of Rs.1.2 lakh crore

- India's gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenues hit a record high in January with inflows of nearly Rs.1.2 lakh crore, 8% higher than a year ago. This could mark the **highest indirect tax revenues for the exchequer since the GST regime was launched in July 2017**.

- The increase could be attributed to the **combined effect of the rapid economic recovery post-pandemic and the nationwide drive against GST evaders** and fake bills along with many systemic changes introduced recently, which have led to improved compliance.
  - Some of the recent measures and reforms include closer monitoring against fake billing, **deep data analytics using data from multiple sources**, including GST, Income tax and Customs IT systems, and effective tax administration.

## 2. Garbage-to-power plant in veggie market gets PM's pat

- The garbage-to-power plant being commissioned inside the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Agriculture Market in Bowenpally has been mentioned during the PM's Mann Ki Baat address.
  - Vegetable and fruit waste is used to **generate power** and has enabled the market committee to make substantial savings in power bills.
  - The plant also supplies **green manure** which could be sold.
  - This also provides an **avenue for sustainable and economically profitable method to get rid of the biodegradable waste**. Around 10 tonnes of waste is generated in the market.
- The plant is based on the **high rate biomethanation technology-based Anaerobic Gas lift Reactor (AGR)** designed and patented by the CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology (IICT).

## G. Prelims Facts

### 1. HAL completes Sukhoi order, last two jets to roll out soon

- Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) has completed the manufacture of the last two of the 272 **Su-30 MKIs** aircraft on contract from Russia. The Su-30s were assembled by HAL at its Nashik plant under **transfer of technology (ToT) mode**.
- Of the 272 fighters, 40 are being modified to carry the air-launched version of the **supersonic cruise missile BrahMos**.
- Other projects of the HAL include manufacturing of the British Hawk advanced jet trainers, the Dornier aircraft.

### 2. Jan. recorded maximum cold wave days in 13 years

- Cold wave condition has continued in the National Capital Region with the minimum temperature touching 3.1 degrees Celsius. There have been seven "cold wave" days, which is the maximum number of such days in January since 2008.
  - In the plains, the **IMD declares a cold wave if the minimum temperature dips to four degrees Celsius**. A **severe cold wave is when the minimum temperature is two degrees Celsius or less**.
- The drop in temperatures could be attributed to the **cold and dry north-westerly winds** that have been blowing through the plains, leading to cold wave conditions.

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

1. Andaman and Nicobar Islands have the highest number of National Parks and Wildlife sanctuaries for any state/Union Territory in India.
2. Andaman and Nicobar Islands house the largest number of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) for any state/Union territory in India.

**Options:**

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

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

- While Andaman and Nicobar have the highest number of Wildlife Sanctuaries for any state/Union Territory in India, with respect to National Parks it stands second. Madhya Pradesh houses the largest number of National Parks.
- With respect to PVTGs, Andaman and Nicobar house 5 PVTGs, while Odisha is home to around 13 PVTGs.

**Q2. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?**

1. The census exercise in India first began in 1872 under British Viceroy Lord Mayo.
2. The first complete census in India was undertaken in 1881 under the British Viceroy Ripon.

**Options:**

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

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

**Census history in India:**

- The census exercise first began in 1872 under British Viceroy Lord Mayo, however the first complete census was taken in 1881 under the British Viceroy Ripon.
- Since then the census is undertaken every 10 years.
- The decennial Census of India has been conducted 15 times, as of 2011.
- Post 1949, the census has been conducted by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India.

- All the censuses since 1951 were conducted under the 1948 Census of India Act. The last census was held in 2011, whilst the next will be held in 2021. The 2021 Census of India will be the 16th Indian Census.

**Q3. Periyar Tiger reserve is located in which of the following states?**

- a. Tamil Nadu
- b. Kerala
- c. Karnataka
- d. Andhra Pradesh

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- Periyar National Park, also known as Periyar Tiger Reserve, is in the mountainous Western Ghats of Kerala, southern India.

**Q4. Which of the following statement/s is/are correct with respect to Biomethanation?**

1. It involves microbiological conversion of bio-degradable material under aerobic condition.
2. The major products of Biomethanation are methane and carbon monoxide.

**Options:**

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

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

- Biomethanation is a process by which organic material is microbiologically converted under anaerobic conditions to biogas.
- Microorganisms degrade organic matter via cascades of biochemical conversions to methane and carbon dioxide.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of the NITI Aayog's 'Sustainable Development of Little Andaman Island – Vision Document', proposing to set up a megacity in the Little Andaman Island, discuss the possible benefits and concerns associated with this proposal. (15 marks, 250 words)[GS-3,Environment and Ecology]



2. Discuss the threats posed by the ageing dams in India. Also suggest necessary measures in this direction. (10 marks, 150 words)[GS-3,Infrastructure]

