

04 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

B. GS 2 Related

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Suu Kyi charged, remanded for 2 weeks](#)
2. [Iran's Rouhani rules out changes to nuclear deal](#)
3. [Sri Lanka's ECT move unilateral: Japan](#)

C. GS 3 Related

ECONOMY

1. ['India's weak fiscal position to remain a key credit challenge'](#)

SECURITY

1. ['Collection of DNA samples will lead to misuse'](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

URBANISATION

1. [Urban visions](#)

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [No to vaccine nationalism, yes to global cooperation](#)

SECURITY

1. ['Smart walls' for Indian borders](#)

F. Tidbits

1. [Govt. notice to Twitter on 'farmer genocide' hashtag](#)

G. Prelims Facts

1. [U.S. extends New START nuclear treaty with Russia](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Suu Kyi charged, remanded for 2 weeks

Context:

Myanmar's ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi has formally been charged after she was detained in a military coup, as calls for civil disobedience to oppose the coup gathered pace.

This topic has been covered in **3rd February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

2. Iran's Rouhani rules out changes to nuclear deal

Context:

Iran's President has ruled out changes to Iran's nuclear accord with world powers and dismissed calls to broaden the terms of the deal and include regional countries.

Background:

- Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and imposed crippling sanctions on Iran in 2018, maintaining a policy of "maximum pressure" against the Islamic republic.
 - JCPOA had promised economic relief for limits on its nuclear programme.
- A year later, Iran responded by gradually suspending its compliance with most of its key nuclear commitments in the deal.

Details:

- U.S. President Joe Biden has voiced support for returning to the accord, from which Donald Trump exited.
- However, Biden has insisted that Tehran must first resume full compliance and consider expanding the deal beyond the nuclear issue.

This topic has been covered in **29th January 2021 CNA**.

- Iran's regional arch-rival, Saudi Arabia, has also called for a role in any future talks on the agreement.

3. Sri Lanka's ECT move unilateral: Japan

Context:

Sri Lanka has backed out of an agreement with India and Japan to develop the East Container Terminal (ECT) at the Colombo Port.

Details:

- New Delhi and Tokyo have been in talks with the Rajapaksa government over the last few months after protests by port union workers over allowing any foreign role or investment in the ECT project cast a shadow over progress in the agreement.
- Japan has reacted to the recent development by saying that the decision was “unilateral and regrettable”.

This topic has been covered in **3rd February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. 'India's weak fiscal position to remain a key credit challenge'

Context:

According to Moody's investors, while Union Budget's focus on higher capital expenditure, financial sector reforms and asset sales would help to stimulate growth and supply broad-based credit support, India's weak fiscal position would remain a key credit challenge compared with its rating peers.

Details:

- The budget projects a narrowing of the central government's fiscal deficit to 6.8% of GDP in fiscal 2022 from an estimated 9.5% in fiscal 2021.
- The ratings agency said the widening of the deficit in fiscal 2021 was driven almost entirely by expenditure to support Indian households and the economy from the pandemic shock.
- It added that, given India's very high debt burden, this gradual pace of consolidation will prevent any material strengthening in the government's fiscal position over the medium term, unless nominal GDP growth were to pick up sustainably to historically very high rates.

Read more on **Fiscal Deficit**.

Recent Development:

- The new Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (Amendment) was tabled in the Parliament.
- The existing fiscal rules have been amended to incorporate the revised threshold of deficit to GDP.
- This is the third time the FRBM has been amended in India.
- As per the second amendment, the “revenue balance” was eliminated and clauses about “revenue balance” were incorporated in the Financial Bill to move away from the “golden (fiscal) rule” of zero revenue deficits.
- The Union Budget 2021-22 has reiterated that fiscal deficit is still the operational concept of deficit in India.

*For in-depth analysis and understanding of the Union Budget 2021-22, watch the LIVE lecture “**Explained: Union Budget 2021-22**” scheduled for 5th February 2021, 8.00 PM.*

Category: SECURITY

1. 'Collection of DNA samples will lead to misuse'

Context:

Retired Supreme Court Judge Justice Madan Lokur has given a written submission to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Science and Technology with his observations on the DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019.

Details:

- Justice Lokur has questioned the need to collect DNA of a “suspect”.
- He argued that in a blind crime or a crime involving a large number of persons (such as a riot), everybody is a suspect without any real basis.
- This would mean that thousands of persons could be subjected to DNA profiling on mere suspicion.
- He has observed that allowing investigating agencies to collect DNA samples from suspects, as laid down in the DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019, will give them unbridled power that is easily capable of misuse and abuse and amount to a threat to the life, liberty, dignity and privacy of a person.
- Also, earlier, fears had been expressed that the law could be used for caste or community-based profiling.
- However, it was observed that these concerns do not negate the need for such legislation, especially when DNA technology was in use.

DNA Technology (Use and Application) Regulation Bill, 2019:

- The Bill proposes DNA sampling and profiling of citizens accused of a crime or reported missing, and storing their unique genetic information for administrative purposes.
- DNA testing is currently being done on an extremely limited scale in India, with approximately 30-40 DNA experts in 15-18 laboratories undertaking fewer than 3,000 cases a year.
 - The standards of the laboratories are not monitored or regulated.
 - The Bill aims to introduce the regulation of the entire process from collection to storage.
- The preamble to the Bill says that it aims to provide for “the regulation of use and application of Deoxyribonucleic Acid [DNA] technology for the purposes of establishing the identity of certain categories of persons, including the victims, offenders, suspects, undertrials, missing persons and unknown deceased persons”.

This topic has been covered in **25th August 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: URBANISATION

1. Urban visions

Budget 2021 has recognised a core component of urbanisation with a clear focus on the expansion of Metro Rail and bus services through central funding.

Transportation and economic development:

- Comfortable, safe and affordable commuting has well-recognised multiplier effects for the economy.
- It has benefits, more generally for public health.
 - However, COVID-19 has had the perverse effect of driving people away to the safety of the personal car and two-wheeler bubbles.
- When the pandemic is under control, more people will return to clean and green mass mobility.

Provisions in the Union Budget 2021-22 to improve public transport:

- Finance Minister's announcement of Central funding for the Kochi, Chennai and Bengaluru Metro projects gives these big cities greater certainty that they can meet targets.
- The impact of the proposed ₹18,000 crore plan to augment public bus transport using a PPP model that will enable private sector players to finance, acquire, operate and maintain over 20,000 buses is, however, uncertain.
- As per the NITI Aayog data, India's ratio of buses to population is a low 1.2 per 1,000 people.
 - It is 8.6 in Thailand and 6.5 in South Africa.
 - Nevertheless, states like Karnataka are well ahead of the national average.
- Licensed private urban bus services remain a politically sensitive topic in many States, where State monopolies coexist with unregulated paratransit.
 - It will take a major effort to convince them that a bus renaissance is a good post-pandemic recovery strategy.
 - The amended Motor Vehicles Act has provisions for the Centre to take the lead here.

Challenges:

- Census 2011 showed that the number of Census Towns, which are urban for census purposes but not named urban local bodies, grew tremendously over a decade.
 - They lack access to funding, infrastructure and capacity to meet the needs of large populations even now.
- The challenge of urbanisation goes beyond standalone interventions such as Metro and bus system grants.
 - State governments, which retain effective control over urban development rather than city administrations, have failed to operationalise the umbrella authorities to regulate transport.
- Common mobility cards that would help citizens use bus, train and feeder networks seamlessly were largely in pilot project mode even before the pandemic.
- There is valid criticism that the existing paradigm is one of "exclusionary urbanisation", which makes Metro and bus services expensive for the majority, particularly for those forced to live in the suburbs due to housing costs, and sometimes making the per kilometre cost of using a two-wheeler more attractive.

Way forward:

- Enhanced ambition requires the Centre to work with State governments to integrate key areas with its transport vision.
- Affordable inner-city housing, including rental projects, access to civic services and health care, and enhanced sustainability, greenery and walkability are needed.
- All these are covered by Central budgetary schemes for cities. Only integration can bring about inclusive urbanisation.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. No to vaccine nationalism, yes to global cooperation

The pandemic has spared no country and everyone needs access to vaccines. With vaccine diplomacy being a hot topic of discussion worldwide, the article talks about the need for coordinated international efforts to bring COVID-19 under control.

How is vaccine production and distribution being managed?

- The expectation that an early vaccination will bring back normalcy and a required push to economic growth fuelled many advanced countries to engage in vaccine battles.
- While the leading and advanced countries have been mindlessly selfish in amassing approved vaccines, it is the Global South countries, India and China, which have provided a ray of hope to most countries.
- 82% of Pfizer's production in 2021 and 78% of Moderna's have already been advance-purchased by rich countries.
- Advance Purchase Contracts:
 - According to data compiled by Duke University, in their quest for ensuring vaccine security, the advance purchase contracts have been entered into by some advanced countries.
 - These contracts would vaccinate their population many times: the European Union, two times, the United States and the United Kingdom, four times, and Canada, six times.

India's role in ensuring global cooperation for COVID-19 vaccination:

- While advanced countries have turned their back on the need of poor countries to access COVID-19 vaccines, India has displayed empathy to their needs.
- India has taken a position that a significant percentage of the approved doses will be permitted for exports.
- India also has shipped out lakhs of doses of the novel coronavirus vaccine to neighbouring countries.
 - New Delhi wants to portray the exercise as yet another testament to its Neighbourhood First policy — the government is going to brand it as "Vaccine Maitri" diplomacy.
- While its exports to neighbouring countries will be under grant mode, the initial shipment of vaccines to the least developed countries will be free of cost.

- And, shipments of vaccines from India have already started reaching different parts of the developing world.
- In a democracy, one can expect the backlash of sending vaccines abroad without vaccinating its population. However, India's gesture was well-appreciated globally.

India's approach only reinforces the need for having coordinated global efforts in bringing COVID-19 under control. This response manifests India's unstinted commitment to global development and has consolidated its name as the world's pharmacy.

Need for global cooperation – Keeping track of Sustainable Development Goals:

- The attitude of India towards vaccinating the populations in the poorer countries has generated discussion in the richer countries about the necessity for more proactive measures to roll out vaccines to the developing nations.
- The reversal of progress on many Sustainable Development Goals, such as SDG 3 ("Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) could affect the health of the world population, and global growth itself.
- Even before COVID-19, projections have shown that 6% of the global population would be in extreme poverty, which has gone up by 71 million.
 - This has caused enormous challenges to SDG 1 ("End poverty in all its forms everywhere").
- According to estimates by the International Monetary Fund, over 50% of emerging markets and developing economies that were converging toward advanced economies' per capita income over the last decade are expected to diverge over the 2020-22 period.

Way Forward – COVAX as a pathway:

- The COVAX project is a global risk-sharing mechanism for pooled procurement and fair distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, an ambitious programme based on funding from high and middle-income countries.
- Although the funding was not enough for the project, U.S. President Biden's decision to join the project has now raised expectations significantly.
- However, since high and middle-income countries are buying up large amounts of the vaccine directly from suppliers, the promise by COVAX to deliver 2 billion doses by the end of 2021 seems to face new challenges.
- COVAX is a unique case of global cooperation and a strategic shift to enhance global development outcomes.
- Furthermore, since most of the vaccines are purchased from the global south for developing nations, the COVAX project can draw new pathways for global development.
- The lower price of the vaccines is what has attracted many commercial buyers globally, including emerging economies such as Brazil and South Africa.
- The ability to produce large volumes of vaccine at an affordable cost underlines India's importance to developing countries when it comes to drug access.
- The development of vaccines is a classic story of global cooperation between the North and the South.

Category: SECURITY

1. 'Smart walls' for Indian borders

Context:

- United States President Joe Biden has stopped the construction of the border wall between the U.S. and Mexico as part of a series of executive actions.
- However, an alternative has been offered.
- Proposed is a 'smart' wall that replaces the physical and armed patrolling with advanced surveillance technology.

Smart Wall:

- The 'smart wall' technology could solve border security issues without the need for a physical barrier.
- The wall would use sensors, radars, and surveillance technology to detect and track border break-ins, and technology capable of performing the most difficult tasks dedicated to border security.

Novelty of "Smart Wall":

- The concept of a smart wall between the U.S. and Mexico is not novel.
- Donald Trump envisaged this concept.
 - It was indicated that artificial intelligence shall be used at a novel scale to complement the border wall project and a technology firm was sought to be hired.
 - It was stated that hundreds of mobile surveillance towers would be deployed, in addition, the complete system of a virtual wall would consist of a radar satellite, computer-equipped border-control vehicles, control sensors and underground sensors.
 - Along with surveillance towers and cameras, thermal imaging would be used, which would help in the detection of objects.
 - The system would even be capable of distinguishing between animals, humans, and vehicles, and then sending updates to handheld mobile devices of the U.S. patrol agents.

Can such a project be undertaken to secure Indian borders?

- India has been struggling with the problem of terrorists and smugglers infiltrating into the country and efforts are ongoing to secure our borders and curb cross-border infiltration.
- Therefore, it is proposed that it is high time that India uses such technology to secure its borders.
- A critical factor that must be considered to enable the usage of such a system along Indian borders is that the terrain in the region is rugged, and not even clearly defined. Hence, erecting fences, walls or any physical structures is extremely difficult.
 - A smart wall makes use of systems that would be designed in such a way that they can operate even in rugged areas.

- In the U.S., various other benefits, such as cost-effectiveness, less damage to the environment, fewer land seizures, and speedier deployment are being noted that give the “smart wall” concept an edge over traditional physical borders.
- Such a system, even if not feasible for our long boundaries, may still be deployed to enhance critical security establishments of the country and complement the already-existing physical fencing and walls.

Conclusion:

- It is imperative for Indian armed forces to be well-equipped and simultaneously have the latest technological advantage over its enemies.
- Experts must explore this idea to effectively counter the problem of cross-border infiltration.

F. Tidbits

1. Govt. notice to Twitter on ‘farmer genocide’ hashtag

What’s in News?

The Union government has issued a notice to Twitter to comply with its order of removal of content related to ‘farmer genocide’.

- The Centre alleged that the material was designed to spread misinformation to inflame passions and hatred, and warned that refusal to do so may invite penal action.
- A source in the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY), which sent the notice to Twitter, said that the firm was an intermediary and was obliged to follow the directions of the government and refusal to do so may invite penal action.

Note:

- Section 69A [3] provides for specific penal consequences in case of non-compliance of the directions issued under Section 69A of the [Information Technology Act, 2000](#).
- Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, was introduced by the Central Government after an amendment to the Act in 2008. This section gave the government the power to block public access to any information online whether on websites or mobile apps.

G. Prelims Facts

1. U.S. extends New START nuclear treaty with Russia

What’s in News?

U.S. President Joe Biden’s administration has extended the New START nuclear treaty with Russia by five years.

Details:

- Russian President Vladimir Putin recently signed off on legislation extending the accord.
- The treaty signed by then-President Barack Obama in 2010 will run until February 5, 2026.

New START Treaty:

- This is the last remaining arms reduction pact between the former Cold War rivals.
- New START caps the number of nuclear warheads that can be deployed by Moscow and Washington to 1,550.

Read more on New START Treaty covered in **28th January 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.**

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Lithium:

1. It finds its use in ceramics, glass, telecommunication and aerospace industries.
2. It is a "Prescribed substance" under the Atomic Energy Act.
3. It is a high energy additive to rocket propellants.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

All the statements are correct.

Read more about **Lithium**.

Q2. "Orobanche" recently seen in news is:

- a. A parasitic weed that causes severe yield loss in mustard.
- b. A recently discovered medicinal plant in the Western Ghats that has immune-modulating properties.
- c. A bacteria used in oil spill clean-ups.
- d. A carnivorous plant that is endemic to the Eastern Ghats.

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Orobanche is a serious hidden parasitic weed in mustard causing severe yield loss to the extent of up to 50%.
- There are no absolute control measures developed for it.

- Also called broomrapes, they are aggressive root parasitic weeds which attack strategic food crops, such as legumes and vegetables, and threaten the livelihood of many nations.
- Heavy Orobanche infestation does not only lead to a complete crop failure, but make field soils Orobanche-sick over a long period of time, preventing the reasonable production of legumes and vegetables in the infested fields for many years to come.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Gobardhan Scheme:

1. It was launched by the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
2. It is being implemented as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin).
3. The scheme aims to support villages in effectively managing their cattle waste and help augment farmers' incomes.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Gobardhan Scheme (Galvanizing Organic Bio-Agro Resources – DHAN) was launched by the Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- It is being implemented as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin).
- The scheme is aimed at managing cattle and biodegradable waste and also help augment farmers' incomes.
- The GOBAR-DHAN scheme, with its focus on keeping villages clean, increasing the income of rural households, and generation of energy from cattle waste, is an important element of the ODF-plus strategy of the Swachh Bharat Mission.
- The scheme aims to support villages in effectively managing their cattle and biodegradable waste.

Q4. Which of the following countries share land boundary with Myanmar?

1. Laos
2. Thailand
3. India
4. China
5. Bangladesh
6. Cambodia

Choose the correct option:

- a. 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- b. 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 only
- c. 2, 3, 4 and 6 only
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 only

Answer: d

Explanation:

Myanmar is bordered by Bangladesh and India to its northwest, China to its northeast, Laos and Thailand to its east and southeast.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. How has an increasing nationalist tendency of the world during the pandemic challenged global cooperation in terms of the distribution of COVID-19 vaccine? Also throw light upon India's vaccine diplomacy in ensuring global cooperation and public good. (15 Marks, 250 Words) (GS-2, International Relations]
2. Critically analyse the feasibility of deploying a virtual surveillance system such as a smart wall in India's international borders to secure its boundaries. (10 Marks, 150 Words).[GS-3, Security]