11 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India is an important partner in the Indo-Pacific region, says U.S.

Context:

Describing India as one of the most important partners of the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific region, the Joe Biden administration said it welcomes India's emergence as a leading global power.

Details:

- The U.S has welcomed India joining the Security Council for a two-year term.
- Both India and the U.S are looking forward to expanded regional cooperation, including through the Quad, and to address the challenges related to COVID-19 and climate change.
- Also, both the countries have reaffirmed the strength of the U.S.-India partnership and discussed issues of mutual concern, including the situation in Myanmar.
- The U.S state department spokesperson said, "the U.S remains India's largest and most important trading partner, with the total bilateral trade increasing to $146 billion in 2019. U.S. companies are a large source of India's foreign direct investment".

C. GS 3 Related

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Furnace oil from Titanium factory spills into sea

Context:

A glass furnace pipe of Travancore Titanium Products Ltd (TTP), a public sector unit making titanium dioxide, broke leading to a major oil spill into the sea and parts of coastal area in Thiruvananthapuram.

Oil Spill:

The contamination of seawater due to an oil pour, as a result of an accident, human error, or natural calamity, is termed as an oil spill.

Details:

- Roughly 5,000 litres of oil is spilt in the sea and coastal area.
- It has contaminated the beach and coastal waters.
- The thick oil has mixed with the sea sand and sedimented at the coast.

Threats:

- An oil leak could have a prolonged impact on marine resources, and consequently, on the livelihood of the fishing community.

- Tourism could also be affected.

Measures taken:

- The leak has been promptly plugged.
- An emergency clean-up was launched along the coast to mitigate the fallout of furnace oil leak.
- Fishing activities along these regions are banned.
- Sand sediments are being removed from the coast. The top soil along the affected stretch of coast would also be removed.
- The Coast Guard is closely monitoring the situation using a ship and a Dornier aircraft.

How is oil spill controlled in general?

- **Skimmers:** Once the oil is bounded by oil booms, it can be extracted or skimmed easily with the help of skimmers or oil scoops. These skimmers are fitted onto boats to remove the floating oil or greasy contaminants.
  - Booms are temporary floating barriers used to contain marine spills, protect the environment, and assist in recovery.
- **Sorbents:** Materials that can absorb liquids are termed as sorbents. The use of sorbents is a natural process of oil clean-up. The most common types of sorbents are peat moss, vermiculite (straw), and hay.
- **In situ burning:** is the process of burning spilled oil where it is on the ocean. Any burn operation includes careful air monitoring to ensure smoke or residue resulting from the burn do not adversely impact people or wildlife.
- **Dispersion:** Chemical dispersion is achieved by applying chemicals designed to remove oil from the water surface by breaking the oil into small droplets.

Category: SECURITY

1. Twitter must follow Indian laws, says Centre

Context:

The Indian government and Twitter are at loggerheads over issues related to content removal and freedom of expression.

Details:

- The Centre expressed deep disappointment over the microblogging platform's partial compliance of its orders grudgingly and with substantial delay.

This topic has been covered in 5th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.

Category: ECONOMY

1. RS passes ports Bill despite opposition

Context:

The [Rajya Sabha](#) passed the Major Port Authoritiues Bill, 2020. The bill will now go to the President of India for his assent.

Salient features of the Major Port Authorities Bill 2020:

- The new Bill has proposed a simplified composition of the Board of Port Authority which will comprise 11 to 13 Members from the present 17 to 19 Members representing various interests.
- The Tariff Authority for Major Ports (TAMP) has been redefined.
    - Port Authority has been given powers to fix tariff which will act as a reference tariff for purposes of bidding for PPP projects.
    - PPP operators will be free to fix tariff based on market conditions.
    - The Board of Port Authority has been delegated the power to fix the scale of rates for other port services and assets including land.
- An Adjudicatory Board has been proposed to be created to carry out the residual function of the erstwhile TAMP for Major Ports.
- The Board of each Major Port shall be entitled to create a specific master plan in respect of any development or infrastructure.
- Provisions of CSR & development of infrastructure by Port Authority have been introduced.

Significance:

- The bill aims to promote the expansion of port infrastructure and facilitate trade and commerce.
- It aims at decentralizing decision making and to infuse professionalism in the governance of major ports.
- It imparts faster and transparent decision making benefiting the stakeholders and better project execution capability.
- It is aimed at reorienting the governance model in central ports to the landlord port model in line with the successful global practice.
    - This will also help in bringing transparency in operations of Major Ports.
    - This will empower the Major Ports to perform with greater efficiency on account of full autonomy in decision making and by modernizing the institutional framework of Major Ports.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. Disinformation is a cybersecurity threat

Context:

- The increasing threat posed by disinformation.

Background:

- So far cybersecurity has mainly focused on protecting and defending computer systems, networks, and our digital lives from disruption.

- The main focus of Cybersecurity has been to defend against cyberattacks executed using malware, viruses, trojans, botnets, and social engineering.

- There has been very little attention to the threat posed by disinformation attacks.

- Also, the industry has treated these attacks (cyberattacks and disinformation attack) independently and has separate teams working in silos to protect and defend against these attacks. The lack of coordination between teams leaves a huge gap that is exploited by malicious actors.

Details:

Disinformation:

- Disinformation attacks are the intentional dissemination of false information, with an end goal of misleading, confusing, or manipulating an audience. These attacks are commonly employed to reshape attitudes and beliefs, drive a particular agenda, or elicit certain actions out of a target audience.

- Nation-state actors, ideological believers, violent extremists, and economically motivated enterprises manipulate the information ecosystem to create social discord, increase polarisation, influence the outcome of an election, etc.

- Disinformation attacks can be employed through traditional media outlets such as TV channels or through social media.

- Disinformation attacks use manipulated, miscontextualised, misappropriated information, deep fakes, and cheap fakes.

- They pose the possibility of societal breakdown, business interruption, and violence in the streets.

Cognitive hacking:

- A cognitive hacking attack attempts to change the target audience's thoughts and actions, galvanise societies and disrupt harmony using disinformation.

- Disinformation is used for social engineering threats on a mass scale.

Examples of disinformation attacks and their impacts:

- QAnon spread false information about the U.S. 2020 presidential election. This led to rioting in the nation.

- Conspiracy theorists (in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Ireland, Cyprus and Belgium) burned down 5G towers because they believed it caused the novel coronavirus pandemic.

- COVID-19 disinformation campaigns have prevented people from wearing masks, using potentially dangerous alternative cures, and not getting vaccinated, making it even more challenging to contain the virus.

Factors aiding disinformation attacks:

- The advertisement-centric business modes and attention economy allow malicious actors to fill the information channels with disinformation with unprecedented speed and scale.
- Deep fakes add a whole new level of danger to disinformation campaigns.

For information on the threat posed by deep fakes refer to:

CNA dated Oct 29, 2020.

- With the advent of social media, disinformation attacks have become increasingly widespread and potent. Digital tools such as bots, algorithms, and AI technology are leveraged to spread and amplify disinformation and micro-target populations on online platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube.

Way forward:

- There is a need to defend, protect and respond, and find effective and practical solutions to counter and intervene against infodemics.

Recognizing disinformation as a cybersecurity threat:

- By treating disinformation as a cybersecurity threat we can find effective countermeasures to cognitive hacking.

Defense-in-depth:

- We need a defense-in-depth strategy for disinformation. The defense-in-depth model identifies disinformation actors and removes them. Authenticity solutions can intervene before disinformation gets posted online.
- If the disinformation still gets by, detection solutions using humans and artificial intelligence, internal and external fact-checking can label or remove the content.

Information sharing:

- ISAC (Information sharing and analysis centers) like mechanism to share the identity, content, context, actions, and behaviours of actors and disinformation across platforms is needed. Information sharing will help disinformation countermeasures to scale better and respond quickly.

Education:

- A critical component of cybersecurity is education. The technology industry, civil society and the government should coordinate to make users aware of the threat of disinformation attacks.
- The industry with public-private partnerships must also invest in media literacy efforts to reach out to the discerning public. Intervention with media education can make a big difference in understanding context, motivations, and challenging disinformation to reduce damage.

Balanced approach:

- There is a need to balance the rights of speech and the freedom of expression with the dangers of disinformation.
- Need to have well-defined laws and regulations for cybersecurity criminals.

Co-ordinated approach:

- The disinformation infodemic requires a concerted and coordinated effort by governments, businesses, non-governmental organisations, and other entities to face the threat posed by disinformation attacks.

For related information refer to:

CNA dated March 30, 2020.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Taking the long view with China

Context:

- The article analyzes India – China relations in the current geopolitical context.

Details:

Rise of China:

- China has been emerging as a major military and economic power not only regionally but also globally.
- The Chinese renminbi may become a global reserve currency. The BRI countries are using the renminbi in financial transactions with China, and can be expected to use it in transactions with each other. China is the world's largest trading economy.
- China could soon become the world's largest economy.
- The European Union created its own cross-border clearing mechanism for trade with China overcoming the U.S.'s hindrance. China has stitched together an investment agreement with the EU and with most of Asia. The EU's reaching out to China despite misgivings of the U.S. means the West has given up on containing the rise of China.
- The China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has increased its membership to 100 countries. China is now the second-biggest financial contributor to the UN and has witnessed immense growth in R&D domain.

Foreign policy challenge for India:

- India has to engage with China which is consolidating an expanding Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) while trying to balance off China through appropriate partnerships.

Way forward for India:

Ensuring strategic autonomy:

- India has a "special and privileged strategic partnership" with Russia, and a "comprehensive global strategic partnership" with the U.S, thus balancing its interests.
- India's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, led by Beijing and Moscow and designed to resist the spread of Western interests is balanced by its participation in the U.S.-led Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), with its anti-China stance.

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- Realism dictates that India does not need to compromise on its strategic autonomy.

Issue based approach:

- India's policy towards China should be guided by the notion of China as a partner, competitor, and economic rival depending on the policy area in question.
- Within the United Nations, India's interests have greater congruence with China's interests rather than the U.S.'s and the EU's.

Playing a bridging role:

- Instead of an alternate development model, India should move the Quad towards supplementing the infrastructure push of the BRI in line with other strategic concerns in the region.
- For example, developing their scientific, technological capacity and digital economy, based on India's digital stack and financial resources of other Quad members, will resonate with Asia and Africa.

Focus on domestic development:

- India needs to focus on achieving a $5 trillion economy, shift to indigenous capital military equipment, and also realize the goals set under the new Science, Technology and Innovation Policy.
- Domestic growth will only make India stronger at the international stage and augur well for India's negotiating prowess.

F. Tidbits

1. SC orders status quo on INS Viraat dismantling

What's in News?

The Supreme Court has ordered status quo on the dismantling of the Navy's decommissioned aircraft carrier, INS Viraat.

- The 67-year-old ship served the Navy for about three decades.

Read more on INS Viraat.

Issue:

- The warship is currently awaiting dismantling at the ship-breaking yard at Alang in Gujarat.
- Envitech had earlier approached the Bombay High Court with a request to buy the decommissioned Viraat so that it could be converted into a maritime museum and a multifunctional adventure centre.
- In the High Court, the Centre had said that the ship was sold to the Gujarat-based Shree Ram Group, a ship-breaking firm, which won the bid.
- The petitioners have argued that Viraat should not be sold as scrap.

2. 'India to better its disaster management'

What's in News?

The Prime Minister of India inaugurated the World Sustainable Development Summit, 2021, organised by The Energy Resources Institute.

- The PM called for the enhancement of India's disaster management capabilities.
- India is part of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure.
- There is a need for improving human resources as well as technology.

Read more on the Summit on PIB dated 10 Feb 2021.

3. Exporters send an SOS after Budget jolt

What's in News?

- India's exporters have red-flagged proposals in the Budget that aim to disallow IGST refunds for exports and empower customs officials to confiscate goods for making a 'wrongful claim'.
- They have warned that these changes would severely hurt exports and could impact India's image as a reliable global supplier.
- The Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) raised concerns stating that the proposals were taking the system towards 'Inspector Raj'.

4. 2.2% UAPA cases from 2016 to 2019 ended in conviction

What's in News?

According to data presented by the Union Home Ministry only 2.2 % of cases registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act between the years 2016 and 2019 ended in convictions by the court.

Read more on the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

G. Prelims Facts

1. BJP MP issues breach of privilege notice against Mahua Moitra

What's in News?

Former Union Minister and BJP MP P.P. Chaudhary issued a breach of privilege notice against Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra in the Lok Sabha.

- The breach of privilege notice was issued for her remarks against a former Chief Justice of India.
- The question was whether the conduct of a judge can be discussed on the floor of the House or not.

Breach of Privilege:

- When any person or authority disregards or attacks any of the rights, immunities and privileges, either of the Members individually or of the House in its collective capacity, the offence is called a breach of privileges and is punishable by the House.
- Apart from breaches of specific privileges, actions in the form of offences against the House's authority or dignity, such as disobedience to its legitimate orders or libels upon itself, its members or officers, are also punishable as contempt of the House.

Punishment for breach of privilege:

The House may impose one of the following punishments on a person found guilty of breach of privilege or contempt of the House:

1. Admonition or reprimand
2. Suspension from the House
3. Expulsion from the House

The penal powers of the House for breach of privilege or contempt of the House are, however, exercised only in an extreme case where a deliberate attempt is made to bring the institution of Parliament into disrespect and undermine public confidence in and support of Parliament.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) is the annual flagship event of:

a. The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI)
b. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
c. United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD)
d. UN Economic and Social Council

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) is the annual flagship event of The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI).
- Started in 2001, the Summit has become a focal point for leaders and stakeholders across the world to bridge thought and action for sustainable development.

Q2. Which was the first-ever aircraft carrier warship of India?

a. INS Viraat
b. INS Vikrant
c. INS Vikramaditya
d. INS Varun

Answer: b

Explanation

- The first-ever aircraft carrier warship of India was INS Vikrant.
- It was decommissioned in 1997.

- INS Vikrant aircraft carrier was bought from the UK; it was first named HMS Hercules and renamed after its sale to India.

Q3. Consider the following statements:

1. Tianwen-1   China National Space Administration
2. Mars Orbiter Mission   Indian Space Research Organisation
3. Mars Express Mission   Roscosmos State Corporation for Space Activities
4. Al-Amal   United Arab Emirates Space Agency

Which of the given pairs are correctly matched?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

Mars Express is a space exploration mission being conducted by the European Space Agency.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Unlawful Activities

(Prevention) Act (UAPA):

1. Under UAPA, both Indian and foreign nationals can be charged.
2. Organisations as well as individuals can be designated as terrorists under the act.
3. It empowers the officers of the NIA, of the rank of Inspector or above, to investigate cases of terrorism.

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.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Given the increasing threat posed by disinformation attacks, analyze the measures needed to counter this threat. (15 marks, 250 words) [GS-3, Internal Security]

2. Realism dictates that India does not need to compromise on its strategic autonomy. Discuss this statement in the light of recent developments with respect to India's foreign policy approach. (10 marks, 150 words) [GS-2, International relations]