

12 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

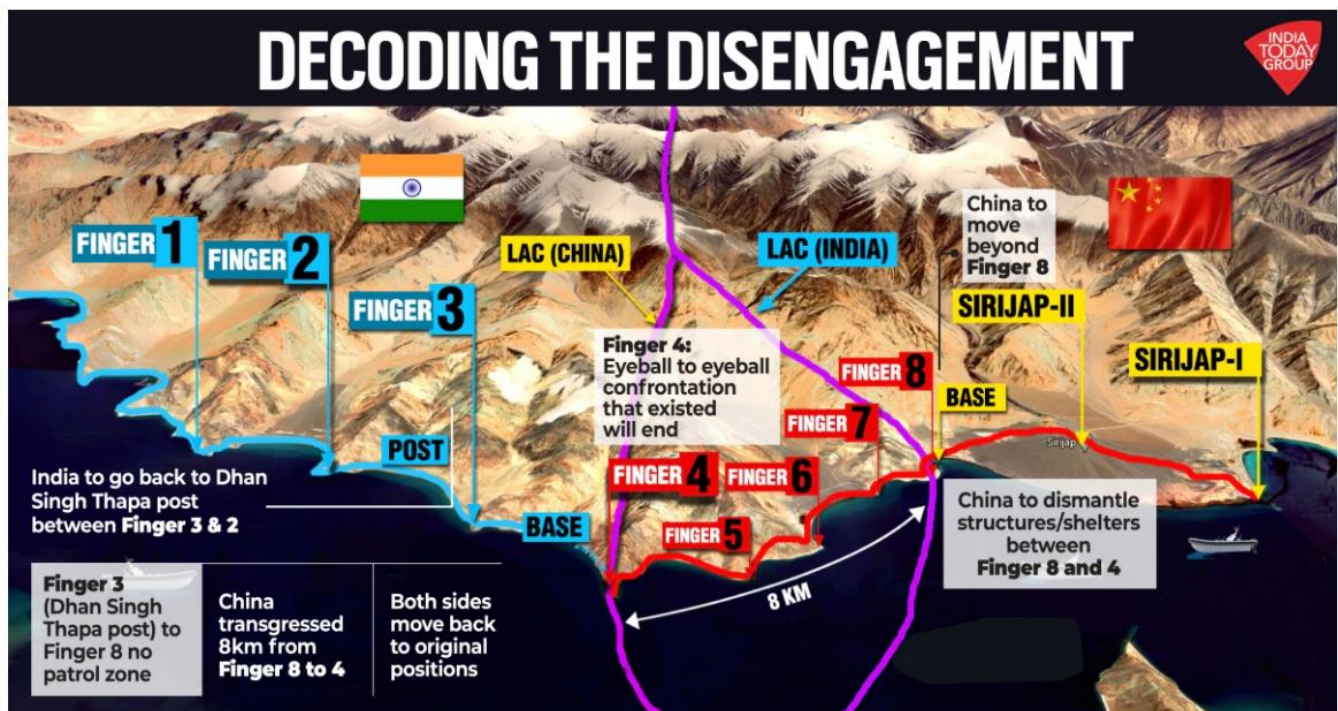
1. Coordinated disengagement at Pangong Tso, Rajnath tells RS

Context:

India and China have reached an agreement on disengagement in the Pangong lake area.

Details:

Disengagement planned on North & South banks of the lake



- Both the countries are working to cease their forward deployments in a phased, coordinated and verified manner and it would substantially restore the situation to that existing prior to the commencement of the stand-off in 2020.
- The Chinese side will keep its troop presence in the North Bank area to the east of Finger 8.
- Reciprocally, the Indian troops will be based at their permanent base at Dhan Singh Thapa Post near Finger 3.
- A similar action would be taken in the South Bank area by both sides.
- As part of the agreement, the Indian Army will vacate these peaks and pull back troops and equipment, while China would remove structures between Finger 4 to Finger 8 on North Bank and withdraw troops.

Note:

- The final breakthrough in the diplomatic-military level talks deadlock came at the 9th round of military-level talks.
- The Corps Commander-level talks and the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) — helped in formulating a “coherent response” to the Chinese challenge, both militarily and diplomatically.
- India had consistently maintained that while bilateral relations could develop in parallel with discussions on resolving the boundary question, any serious disturbance in peace and tranquillity along the LAC in the border areas was bound to have adverse implications for the direction of bilateral ties.
- The Indian side is going to be extra cautious since the verification process had gone awry the last time — it had led to clashes in Galway Valley where 20 Indian soldiers lost their lives.

2. U.S. imposes sanctions on Myanmar

Context:

The U.S. President Joe Biden announced sanctions against Myanmar’s Generals and demanded they relinquish power.

Background:

- Myanmar’s civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi has been ousted and detained along with other senior figures of her National League for Democracy (NLD) party.
- The military has seized control of the Southeast Asian nation.
- The coup in Myanmar coincided with the first month of the Biden administration in the U.S., which has promised to bring back the values of democracy and respect for human rights to the core of the U.S. foreign policy.

This topic has been covered in **3rd February 2021** and **5th February 2021** Comprehensive News Analysis.

Details:

- Western nations have repeatedly denounced the coup, with the U.S. leading calls for the Generals to renounce power.
- Joe Biden’s administration announced that it was cutting off the Generals’ access to \$1 billion in funds in the U.S.
- European Union Foreign Policy Chief also warned the bloc could impose fresh sanctions on Myanmar’s military.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. UPSC advertises for lateral entry into Central administration

Context:

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has issued an advertisement to recruit 30 persons at the Joint Secretary and Director level in the central administration through lateral entry in the second round.

Details:

- Earlier, eight persons, mostly domain experts, were selected for various departments and ministries.
- In the latest round, of 30 positions advertised by the UPSC, three are for Joint Secretary and 27 are for Director level.
- As per the advertisement, online applications have been invited for Ministries, Departments, PSUs, autonomous bodies of the Central government and the contractual appointment would be for a period of three years and extendable up to five years depending on the performance.

For In-depth analysis of Lateral Entry into Central administration, read the [gist of RSTV: The Big Picture – Lateral Entry in Bureaucracy](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SECURITY

1. Follow the law, social media platforms told

Context:

Minister for Information Technology and Communications said that global social media platforms should follow the law and the Constitution of India.

Background:

- Recently, the Indian government and Twitter were at loggerheads over issues related to content removal and [freedom of expression](#).
- The Centre had 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](#).

Details:

- He said that his Ministry had flagged Twitter and called out the site for double standards, adding that "freedom of speech" was there but Article 19 (2) of the Constitution added reasonable restrictions because of the sovereignty and integrity of India.
- He asserted that while global social media platforms were welcome to work and earn money in India, they must follow India's laws.

2. 17 major OTT players adopt self-regulatory toolkit

Context:

The Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI) has said that 17 platforms, including Netflix, Disney+ Hotstar and Amazon Prime Video, have adopted a 'toolkit' for effective implementation of the self-regulation code introduced in 2020.

Background:

- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting through a gazette notification had placed 'Over the Top' (OTT) platforms or video streaming service providers like Netflix, Hotstar, Amazon Prime and digital news under the ambit of the Ministry.
- The change was made through the amendment of the Allocation of Business Rules.
- The move had raised fears of censorship.

Read more on this issue covered in **13th November 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis.**

Details:

- The industry body added that it will set up an 'IAMA Secretariat for the Code', comprising representatives from the signatories to the Code, as well as the IAMA, for its implementation.
 - The toolkit not only aims to set out guiding principles and code of ethics, but it also addresses the feedback received from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on the issues of conflict of interest and prohibited content.
 - It particularly aims at strengthening the grievance redressal mechanism.
 - It further sets out clear tent poles that the OCCPs [Online Curated Content Provider] need to undertake to achieve a common goal of entertaining millions of Indians responsibly.
- IAMA said that the toolkit will also provide for procedures to effectuate the various provisions of the Code; assist the signatories in fulfilling their commitments and responsibilities as set out in the Code and achieve effective self-regulation goals as envisioned by the signatories in the Code.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. In Biden's policy pursuit, the world order challenge

Context:

- Joe Biden's election as the U.S. President.

Background:

Foreign policy under U.S. President Donald Trump:

- The U.S. under President Trump had withdrawn from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the nuclear agreement with Iran. The U.S. had imposed strong sanctions on Iran.
- The U.S. had engaged in a trade war with China and the ties between the two countries had been at the lowest level. The US had been trying to galvanize the [Quad](#) as a countermeasure against the Chinese.
- The U.S. policy vis-a-vis Russia had been accommodative.

Biden's policy approaches:

- Biden has already revealed that despite some differences in policy content and diplomatic style, his term is likely to show more continuity than change where the U.S.'s core interests are concerned, specifically in its ties with Russia, China and Iran.

Iran policy:

- Joe Biden has been a strident critic of the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran. He had promised during his presidential election campaign that subject to Iran's compliance with its obligations, the U.S. would re-enter the agreement.
- Iran's Foreign Minister has called on Mr. Biden to uphold his commitment on the Iran nuclear deal. He also warned that "containment" of Iran would not work.
- Biden's Iran policy is likely to match Mr. Trump's hardline approach on substantive matters, but without the bravado associated with the previous regime like the killing of Qasem Soleimani.
- The US is likely to pressurize Iran on the issues of its ballistic missiles programme, nuclear programme and Iran's "acts of terrorism" and its support to militant organizations operating in or against U.S.'s regional partners like Saudi Arabia and UAE.
- The U.S. may be looking at a long-term diplomatic engagement not just on the nuclear issue but on all matters that have security implications for the U.S. and its regional partners.
- However, unlike the previous regime characterized by its 'Maximum pressure' tactic on Iran, the U.S. could offer some palliatives to Iran to incentivize Iran into a dialogue. This could involve measures such as the International Monetary Fund providing funds to Iran to combat the novel coronavirus pandemic.

China Policy:

- China has been termed the U.S.'s "most serious competitor".
- The reference to China was with respect to 'economic, IPR and human right aspects, instead of the security concerns resulting from the aggressive Chinese posture'. The U.S. president in his speech outlining the regime's foreign policy framework did not refer to Indo-Pacific, the South China Sea or the Quad.
- In fact, the U.S. president stated that Washington would engage China if it served U.S. national interests.

Russia policy:

- Biden is likely to reverse his predecessor Donald Trump's personal accommodative approach towards Russia and adopt the U.S.'s traditional confrontational posture.
- The U.S. President has promised a strong push back against Russia terming it as a threat to U.S.'s interests.
- Ukraine issue, the cyberattacks on U.S. and human rights issues in Russia could be points of conflict between the two nations.

Concerns:

- Uncertainties around the Iran nuclear agreement could lead to tectonic changes in the new global and regional order.

Regional concerns:

Threat by U.S's allies:

- Israel's armed forces commander, Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, has warned against any move to take forward the stalled Iranian nuclear deal. Israel has threatened decisive actions (military) against any nuclear development in Iran.
- Israel and the U.S.'s Gulf allies, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have insisted that they be involved with the discussions with Iran on the revival of the agreement.

Isolation of Iran and the possible reaction:

- Given the high unlikelihood of quick easing of sanctions on Iran particularly with no signs of an early easing of sanctions on Iranian oil sales, Iran may find itself remaining isolated and this would lead to the Iranian political leadership's reluctance to work cooperatively with western powers.
- Iran's regional influence remains significant, based on the backing of Shia militia in diverse locales as Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen and Syria. Iran continues to possess the ability to mobilise militants across the region.
- The capabilities of Iran's precision missiles and drones are also a matter of regional anxiety. Given the advanced air and missile power available with Israel, Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf states, there is no prospect of Iran curtailing its missiles and drone programmes.

Instability in the region:

- The situation will continue to remain tense in the region with Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates engaging in a face-off with Iran and its allies, Iraq, Syria and its Shia militia.

Impact on international geopolitics:

- The ambivalence being exhibited by the U.S. in its approach towards foreign policy could cede its numero uno position in global affairs.
- Russia is now an influential player in the region; China, too, with its Belt and Road Initiative, has high stakes in West Asian regional stability.
- The Sino-Iran 25 years agreement, envisages substantial and long-term cooperation in political, security, military, economic, energy and logistical connectivity areas.
- Biden will thus witness a new world order, shaped by a coalition of Russia, China and Iran, in which the U.S. is no longer the most significant role-player.

For more information on the new US foreign policy, refer to:

[CNA dated Feb 7, 2021.](#)

Category: ECONOMY

1. Tender cut

Context:

- The government's statement about bringing in a law on cryptocurrencies.

Background:

Government's stand on Cryptocurrencies:

- The government has repeatedly suggested that it does not consider cryptocurrencies to be legal tender.
- The government has expressed serious concerns regarding cryptocurrencies. Cryptocurrencies are highly volatile, used for illicit Internet transactions, and remain wholly outside the ambit of the state regulation.
- Regulatory bodies like RBI and SEBI don't have a legal framework to directly regulate cryptocurrencies as they are neither currencies nor assets or securities or commodities issued by an identifiable user.
- In 2018, the RBI did send a circular to banks directing them not to provide services for those trading in cryptocurrencies.

Supreme Court's stand:

- The Supreme Court has set aside the circular of the Reserve Bank of India that prohibited banks and entities regulated by it from providing services in relation to virtual currencies, terming such regulation "disproportionate".

For more information on the SC judgment, refer to:

[CNA dated March 5, 2020.](#)

Details:

- The Minister of State for Finance has recently confirmed in the Rajya Sabha that a Bill with respect to cryptocurrencies would be introduced soon.
- This move on cryptocurrencies is welcome, as it could put an end to the existing ambiguity over the legality of these currencies in India.
- The cryptocurrencies have been having a growing clientele in India and their attraction could be expected to only grow going forward.

Way forward:

- The government must resist the idea of a ban and push for smart regulation. Smart regulation is preferable, as a ban on cryptocurrencies that are based on a technology of distributed ledger cannot be implemented for all practical purposes.
- The recommendation by India's inter-ministerial committee for an official digital currency as well as for the promotion of the underlying blockchain technology should be pursued further.

2. Is India's Digital Services Tax discriminatory?

This issue has been discussed earlier under the following article: **[CNA dated Jan 8, 2021.](#)**

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. A resilient future for Uttarakhand

Context:

- Glacial burst on Nanda Devi triggered an avalanche and caused flash floods in Rishiganga and Dhauliganga rivers in Chamoli district of Uttarakhand.

For more information on this refer to:

[CNA dated Feb 8, 2021.](#)

Possible reasons:

- The occurrence of the current glacier burst is being attributed to large scale erosion, a build-up of water pressure, an avalanche of snow or rocks, landslides or an earthquake under the ice.
- According to the Wadia Institute of Himalayan Geology, a rock mass, weakened from years of freezing and thawing of snow, may have led to the creation of a weak zone and fractures leading to a collapse that resulted in flash floods.

Impact:

- The death toll from the incident has been 34 with more than 170 people missing.
- The floods have also caused heavy damage to public and private infrastructure, including the NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad hydropower project and the Rishiganga mini-hydro project.

Vulnerability of Uttarakhand:

- For years, geologists, glaciologists and climate experts have voiced their fears about impending disasters in the region due to the following reasons.

Natural characteristics:

- Uttarakhand is located in the region of the young and unstable Himalayas. It is also subject to intense rainfall.

Human factors:

- Climate change and the rapid and indiscriminate construction activities, and the subsequent ecological destruction in the region have made the region vulnerable to disasters.
- The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment Report (2019) had pointed out that one-third of the Hindu Kush Himalaya's glaciers would melt by 2100. It also warned that any ecologically destructive activities would lead to more intensified disasters like landslides.
- The large-scale human settlements and expansion of agricultural activities have led to massive deforestation. The widespread settlements, farming, cattle grazing and other anthropogenic activities have destroyed the natural barriers that control avalanches and floods, thereby enhancing the possibilities of a glacial lake outburst flood.
- In 2014, an expert committee led by Dr Ravi Chopra, instituted to assess the role of dams in exacerbating floods, noted how haphazard construction of dams was increasing the vulnerability of the region.

Way forward:

- The need of the hour is to invest in long-term crisis response mechanisms and resilience solutions.

Short term measures:

- Strengthening embankments
- Climate proofing the existing infrastructure
- Investing in a robust monitoring and early warning system

Long term measures:

- Investing in resilience planning, especially in flood prevention and rapid response.
- Reassessing development of hydropower and other public infrastructure in the region.
- Establishing implementable policies and regulatory guidelines to restrict detrimental human activities, including responsible eco- and religious tourism policies.
- Investing in training and capacity building to educate and empower local communities to prevent and manage risks effectively.

F. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Unani system of medicine:

1. The Unani system of medicine originated in Greece.
2. Unani was introduced in India by the Arabs and Persians.
3. It assumes the four main elements – Fire, Water, Air and Earth.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Unani system of medicine originated in Greece, however, its present form was saved by the Arabs.
- Unani medicine is also known as Unani Tibb, Arabian medicine, or Islamic medicine.

- It is a healing philosophy that takes from ancient Greek medicine. In Arab, Unani means 'Greek.'
- It assumes the four main elements – Fire, Water, Air and Earth which corresponds to four humours – Phlegm, Black bile, Blood, and Yellow bile respectively.
- Unani was introduced in India by the Arabs and Persians.
- World Unani day is celebrated on 11th February, the birth anniversary of great Unani scholar and social reformer Hakim Ajmal Khan (1868 – 1927). He was a Unani medical educationist and founder of scientific research in the Unani system of medicine.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to the National Coal Index (NCI):

1. It is a price index which reflects the change of price level of coal on a particular year relative to the fixed base year.
2. It was rolled out by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry.
3. The indices are separate for Non-Coking and Coking Coal.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The National Coal Index (NCI) is a price index which reflects the change of price level of coal on a particular month relative to the fixed base year.
- NCI was rolled out by the Ministry of Coal in June 2020.
- The coal ministry has rolled out the National Coal Index to be used for the purpose of auction of coal mines for commercial mining on a revenue share basis.
- NCI is composed of a set of five sub-indices: three for Non-Coking Coal and two for Coking Coal.
- The three sub-indices for Non-Coking Coal are combined to arrive at the Index for Non-Coking Coal and the two sub-indices for Coking Coal are combined to arrive at the Index for Coking Coal.
- Thus, indices are separate for Non-coking and Coking Coal.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Swadhar Greh Scheme:

1. It is a social welfare flagship programme, created by the Central Government, to provide housing for the rural poor in India.
2. It aims at providing housing for all in rural areas by the year 2022.
3. The scheme was launched by the Ministry of Rural Development.

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. None of the above

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Swadhar Greh Scheme was launched for Women in Difficult Circumstances. It was launched by the Department of Women and Child Development in 2001- 02. The scheme aims to rehabilitate such women in difficult circumstances by providing shelter, food, clothing, counseling, training, clinical and legal aid.
- Swadhar Greh Scheme envisages providing shelter, food, clothing and health as well as economic and social security for women in distress.
- Under this scheme, Swadhar Greh will be set up in every district with a capacity of 30 women.
- The scheme also envisages offering legal aid and guidance to these women for their readjustment in family/society.
- It also offers vocational training and economic rehabilitation so that they can start their life afresh with dignity.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to the Hindu Kush – Himalayan region:

1. The Hindu Kush – Himalayan region spans across 8 countries.
2. The region stores more snow and ice than anywhere else in the world outside the polar regions.
3. The region hosts four biodiversity hotspots.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Hindu Kush – Himalayan region spans across eight countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, Myanmar and Pakistan.
- The region stores more snow and ice than anywhere else in the world outside the polar regions.
- The HKH region hosts four biodiversity hotspots – the Himalaya, the Indo-Burma, the mountains of southeast China and the mountains of Central Asia.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The possible shift in the foreign policy of the new administration in the U.S. would have both regional and global repercussions. Elucidate. (15 marks, 250 words) [GS-2, International Relations]
2. What are the possible benefits and concerns associated with the usage of cryptocurrencies in India? Suggest suitable measures in this regard. (10 marks, 150 words) [GS-3, Economy]

