

18 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Case against Priya Ramani rejected

Context:

A Delhi court rejected a criminal defamation case filed by former Union Minister M.J. Akbar against journalist Priya Ramani for her tweets accusing him of sexual harassment.

Issue:

- At the height of the [#MeToo movement](#) in 2018, Ms. Ramani accused Mr. Akbar of sexual harassment.
- Akbar had said that Ms. Ramani's tweets lowered his reputation.
- He had in his criminal defamation complaint claimed that Ms. Ramani's tweet and her article accusing him of sexual harassment were defamatory, and lowered his reputation.

Details:

- It was said that the woman has a right to put her grievance at any platform of her choice and even after decades.
- "Despite how well-respected some persons are in society, they — in their personal lives — could show extreme cruelty to the females," the court observed.
- The court asserted that "The woman cannot be punished for raising voice against the sex abuse on the pretext of criminal complaint of defamation as the right of reputation cannot be protected at the cost of the right of life and dignity of a woman as guaranteed in the Constitution,".

Defamation:

- Defamation is the communication of a false statement that harms the reputation of an individual person, business, product, group, government, religion, or nation.
- In India, defamation is both a civil and a criminal offence.
 - In **Civil Law**, defamation mostly falls under the Law of Torts, which imposes punishment in the form of damages awarded to the claimant (person filing the claim).
 - Under **Criminal Law**, Defamation is a bailable, non-cognizable and compoundable offence.

Criminal Defamation:

- Criminal defamation has been specifically defined as an offence under Section 499 of the [Indian Penal Code \(IPC\)](#).
- According to Section 499, defamation could be through words, spoken or intended to be read, through signs, and also through visible representations.
- However, there are exceptions to this. “Imputation of truth” which is required for the “public good” and thus has to be published, on the public conduct of government officials, the conduct of any person touching any public question and merits of the public performance are exceptions.

2. Don't certify key Bills as money Bills, Cong. writes to Om Birla

Context:

In a pre-emptive move, the Congress has written to Lok Sabha [Speaker](#), urging him not to bypass the Rajya Sabha by declaring seven key Bills, including one on the privatisation of two public sector banks, as money Bills.

Money Bill:

- Money Bill is defined in Article 110 of the Indian Constitution.
- Money bills are concerned with financial matters like taxation, public expenditure, etc.
- The Rajya Sabha has limited powers to legislate on a money bill.
- The Lok Sabha is free to accept or reject amendments made by the Rajya Sabha on a money Bill.

Read [more](#) on [Money](#) [Bill](#).

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. U.S. will pay over \$200 million to WHO'

Context:

U.S. Secretary of State has announced that the U.S would pay the [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#) \$200 million by the end of February 2021.

Details:

- The announcement is significant as former U.S. President Donald Trump had begun the process of withdrawing the U.S. from the WHO.
- The process is stopped by his successor, President Joe Biden.
- It reflects the renewed commitment of the U.S in ensuring the WHO has the support it needs to lead the global response to the pandemic.
- The secretary of state said, “The U.S. believes that multilateralism, the United Nations, the World Health Organization, are essential not just as an effective international COVID-19 health and humanitarian response but also building stronger global health capacity and security for the future.”
- The country plans to provide significant financial support to COVAX through Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

- He also expressed their commitment to strengthening other multilateral initiatives involved in the global COVID-19 response — for example, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. Cabinet approves PLI plan for telecom

Context:

The Union Cabinet approved the production-linked incentive scheme for the telecom sector with an outlay of ₹12,195 crore over five years.

Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme:

- Production Linked Incentive (PLI) is a scheme that intends to give companies incentives on incremental sales from products manufactured in domestic units.
- The scheme also aims to invite foreign companies to establish their base in India.
- The scheme also aims to encourage local companies to set up or expand existing manufacturing units.

Read more about the scheme covered in the [12th November 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- The implementation of the PLI scheme in telecom manufacturing will start from April 1, 2021.
- The scheme, which aims to make India a global hub for manufacturing telecom equipment, is expected to lead to an incremental production of about ₹2.4 lakh crore, with exports of about ₹2 lakh crore over five years and bring in investments of more than ₹3,000 crore.
- The core 'component' of this scheme is to offset the import of telecom equipment worth more than ₹50,000 crore.

Category: SECURITY

1. 'Pak. to remain in FATF grey list until June'

Context:

The FATF's Plenary and Working Group meetings, scheduled to be held from February 21 to 26, 2021 in Paris, are all set to decide on Pakistan's grey list status.

Background:

- Pakistan was placed on the 'grey' list in June 2018.
- The country was given a timeline to implement 27 action points.
- In its October meeting, the Financial Action Task Force ([FATF](#)) decided to keep Pakistan on the grey list until the next review of its compliance with the recommendations made in February 2021.

Read more on this topic covered in [24th October 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- Pakistan is unlikely to exit the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) 'grey' list until June 2021, despite its efforts to garner support from the member nations ahead of the plenary meeting of FATF.

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Govt. denies link between Char Dham project, floods

Context:

The government denied any link between the Char Dham road-widening project in Uttarakhand and the recent flash floods in the Rishiganga valley, in the Supreme Court.

Read more on the flash floods that took place at Chamoli in Uttarakhand covered in the [8th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Read more about [Chardham Project](#).

Issue:

- The 899-km-long project that connects the shrines of Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath in Garhwal Himalayas is under the Supreme Court's scanner after NGO Citizens for Green Doon raised environmental concerns over the cutting of trees and harm to the fragile Himalayan ecology by the widening of the existing mountain roads.
- Activists had called for narrower roads to protect the Himalayan ecosystem.
- Also, the chairman of a Supreme Court-appointed expert committee had alleged violations of the court orders in the execution of the Chardham road project.

Read more on this topic covered in the [5th October 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- The denial came in response to a communication from a high-powered committee (HPC) chairperson connecting the tragedy with the Char Dham project.
 - The HPC was formed to be the eyes and ears of the Supreme Court on the project. However, it had not been unanimous in its views.
- In January 2021, the government supported a majority view within the committee favouring the need to broaden the Himalayan feeder roads to the Indo-China border to facilitate troop movement.

Read more on this topic covered in [19th January 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. A growing rights crisis in Lanka

Context:

The human rights situation in Sri Lanka has worsened since Gotabaya Rajapaksa became President in 2019.

Background:

- Rajapaksa was the defence secretary in the government led by his brother Mahinda from 2005 to 2015.
- The period was marked by particularly egregious human rights abuses.
 - Critics of the government were murdered, tortured, and forcibly made to disappear.
 - Tens of thousands of civilians were killed in the civil war which ended in 2009 between government forces and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), with both sides responsible for numerous war crimes.
 - In the final months of the war, the armed forces indiscriminately shelled civilians and summarily executed suspected LTTE fighters.
- When Mahinda Rajapaksa lost the 2015 presidential election, there was hope for change.
 - There was greater freedom of expression.
 - The repressive and heavily militarised situation in Tamil-majority areas began to improve.
 - The new government supported a consensus resolution at the Human Rights Council that offered victims of abuses and their families truth, justice, and reconciliation.

Current Scenario:

- Now, fear has returned. Tamil communities in the north and the east fear increasing abuses.
- The Rajapaksa government, in 2020, renounced its commitments under the 2015 Human Rights Council resolution and is threatening victims' families and activists who supported it.
 - A presidential commission set up to investigate supposed "political victimisation" of officials by the previous government has recommended the exoneration of those implicated in cases of abuse.
 - Numerous people who were involved in war crimes have been appointed to senior roles.
- Since 2020, singing the national anthem in Tamil has been dropped from Independence Day celebrations.
- The religious rights of minorities are under attack, including interference with Hindu temples.
- In January 2021, the authorities bulldozed a memorial at Jaffna university that commemorated Tamil civilian victims of the civil war.
 - People who participated in a protest march are facing criminal investigation.
- The Rajapaksa government has shown outright disdain for accountability.

Details:

- Since 2012, the Human Rights Council has sought to work with Sri Lanka to promote reconciliation and accountability.
 - India has backed these efforts.
- Sri Lanka is now rejecting that endeavour and is proposing a new domestic commission that UN experts have dismissed as lacking credibility or independence.

What Next?

- Indian leaders have committed to supporting the rights of minority Tamils in Sri Lanka to “live with equity, equality, justice, peace and dignity”.
- In pledges to the United Nations, the Indian government has also vowed to uphold global human rights.
- At its next session, the [UN Human Rights Council \(UNHRC\)](#) will face a crucial test in taking action for protecting vulnerable Sri Lankans and upholding international law.
- India, as a council member, will have a key role.

Way Forward:

- The UNHRC should recognise the government’s actions for what they are — an effort to impede justice.
- A new resolution is urgently needed to protect vulnerable minority communities in Sri Lanka, by upholding the principle of accountability for the worst crimes.
- India should join other member states in supporting a resolution to reduce the growing risk of future atrocities.

Category: HEALTH

1. Redefining the exit plan for COVID-19

Context:

There has been a reduction in the incidence, severity, and mortality related to COVID-19 locally in some countries, including India, which meets the definition of “control”. With the pandemic seeming to be under control, the question is “How is the pandemic going to end?”

- The end to the pandemic would not be instantaneous. In fact, there may not be an end to the virus at all.
- The virus is evolving to cohabit with humans, and this can include a range of possibilities, from the virus becoming less lethal, more infectious, to it becoming virulent.
- Nonetheless, the SARS-CoV-2 virus is likely to remain alive and around.

Elimination strategy:

- Some well-intentioned experts have advocated an elimination strategy, otherwise known as the zero-COVID-19 strategy, wherein replication of the virus is reduced to a bare minimum and no new cases occur in a defined geographical area.
- The strategy has three elements:

- Rapid reduction in the number of infections to zero.
- Creation of virus-free green zones.
- Prompt outbreak management when new cases occur occasionally.

Challenges:

- Rich countries have found a shortcut for the elimination strategy — to vaccinate every citizen in the country.
- The plan is well-suited for geographically isolated countries that can afford strict border control measures, e.g.: New Zealand.
- Even there, the goal of zero COVID-19 cases is elusive since the virus continues to be in circulation in other countries.
 - The risk of infection from elsewhere, and outbreaks, would always be imminent.
 - There has to be universal coverage of vaccines with consistent upgrades, as the pace of vaccine development may not match the new variants' emergence.
 - A zero-COVID-19 strategy will worsen global health inequities by creating green zones of free travel among richer countries, thus alienating poorer nations.

Experience with other diseases:

- So far, there is no empirical evidence to suggest how eliminating the SARS-CoV-2 virus is feasible in the near term.
- Even though elimination programmes for measles and neonatal tetanus have been ongoing for more than 20 years now, the goals have not been completely realised.
- Polio, eradicated from southeast Asia, is still endemic in Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- Maternal and neonatal tetanus, which has an 80% to 100% case fatality rate, caused the deaths of nearly 25,000 newborns in 2018.
- Despite the global efforts to vaccinate children over the last few decades, these preventable diseases still remain major public health challenges in the developing world.

Issue:

- Immunologists opine that the virus will become endemic, i.e., some regions will see a constant presence of COVID-19.
- The level of endemicity depends on how the world reduces inequities of all kinds, including access to vaccines, and how well public health measures, such as containment, are followed.
- There is a need for pragmatic measures for the realistic goal of saving lives.
 - It must be ensured that disease control measures are implemented globally.
 - Vaccine coverage for vulnerable people must be ramped up.
 - In addition to meticulous review at the country and regional levels, vaccine coverage for the vulnerable population across the globe is an immediate necessity.

- The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the flaws in our preparedness and inefficient public health systems that lead to disproportionately high morbidity and mortality among the poor and the vulnerable.

Way Forward:

Pursuing Universal Health Coverage:

- The pandemic has also reversed the gains made in programmes like tuberculosis control, caused economic hardships, worsened inequalities, and pushed the poor towards the brink of catastrophe.
- The focused efforts against COVID-19 must not ruin the progress made in other disease control programmes and our commitment to [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#).
- It is also essential to resume pursuing the agenda of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).

Combined Global Efforts:

- So long as disease control is neglected in even a few parts of the world, every other part is at risk of importing infections due to free travel.
- Instead of isolated strategies for a few countries, what is needed is global leadership and resources to vaccinate the vulnerable population and strengthen epidemiological and genomic surveillance for COVID-19.

A recalibrated strategy:

- Global elimination of COVID-19 in the immediate term is a tricky goal.
- The zero-COVID-19 strategy seeks luxury that few countries can afford, does not reflect field realities.
- Such a plan if adopted may result in diverting most of our attention, funds, and time.
- Excessive focus on one virus in select countries will only worsen the poor global preparedness to fight other pandemics in the future or tackle the devastating burden of non-communicable diseases.
- For global health, every idea must be assessed based on its merit while ensuring that there is maximisation of benefits for people across the world.

Conclusion:

At this stage, the goal of elimination will divert focus and steer the world in a different direction altogether. A pragmatic goal of controlling COVID-19 combined with a renewed emphasis on UHC can restore and rejuvenate an ailing healthcare system and bolster our progress towards realistic goals.

Category: INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Slow on safety

Context:

Recently, a horrific bus accident took place in Madhya Pradesh's Sidhi district. The bus passengers were trapped within the bus as it landed into a swollen canal near Patna village. There were about 57 people on the bus, out of which 50 were left dead.

Issues:

- This ghastly mishap brings to light the fact that India, with the world's worst record on road safety, must take measures to get its act together.
- According to the recently released World Bank-commissioned report – Traffic Crash Injuries and Disabilities, India has 1% of the world's vehicles but 11% of all road accident deaths.
 - According to the Union Transport Ministry, the number of dead in 2019 was 1,51,113 and injured- 4,51,361.
- India loses 3% of its GDP due to road accidents, most of which are preventable.
- Transport departments continue to take an indulgent view of rule violations.
- Political parties and others fix illegal flag poles and spears on car bonnets and metal contraptions to SUV bumpers, which are deadly in an accident.
- The Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act of 2019 has provisions that aim to bring about change.

Read more about the [Road Safety and Motor Vehicles \(Amendment\) Act 2019](#).

- But, most States have been lukewarm towards hard steps to bring order to the roads.
- The zero-tolerance rule enforcement has been viewed through the lens of populism. This is reflected in the spate of accidents on India's highways.
 - India witnessed 61% of deaths on highways from just 5% of all accidents, as per 2019 data.

Details:

- Those who suffer the most are from low-income households, especially in rural areas.
- More number of women bear the long-term financial and psychological impact of the losses.

Way Forward:

- In the wake of this bus mishap, the immediate response has been to order a magisterial inquiry, which is no substitute for a technical investigation conducted by safety experts.
 - A technical investigation is a must to understand and prevent any such mishaps.
- Only incremental steps taken by the Centre and the States are not enough.
- Such an incident affecting the fundamental right to life of the average citizen must lead to intensive measures and a determined campaign.
- The Centre must now set a timeline to operationalise the National Road Safety Board to lay down engineering standards and complaints procedures that will help citizens hold States to account.
- Meeting the SDGs on transport and reduced road deaths and injuries will need actions that go beyond pious declarations.
- Ending the silent pandemic of accidents will need education, civil society cooperation and professional policing.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Transit anticipatory bail

What's in News?

Legal provisions invoked in Greta 'toolkit' case.

This issue has been covered in the [15th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

When does a person apply for anticipatory transit bail?

- When a person is apprehending arrest by the police of a state other than where they are at present, they approach the nearest competent court for a transit anticipatory bail.
- The court does not have jurisdiction over the place where the case is registered or where crime has been alleged to have been committed but since the question of personal liberty is involved, the High Courts across India generally allow such prayer depending upon the merits of the case.
- The relief is sought to seek temporary protection from arrest and simultaneously get time to approach the appropriate court of that place, wherefrom the police has come or where the case is registered, for a similar pre-arrest bail.

G. Tidbits

1. India to gift 2 lakh vaccine doses to UN peacekeepers

What's in News?

India has announced a gift of 2,00,000 doses of vaccine to the UN Peacekeeping Forces.

- India has already sent vaccines to 25 countries under its Vaccine Maitri programme.
- 49 more countries would be supplied vaccines by India in the coming days.
- At the UNSC, the external affairs minister called for an end to "vaccine nationalism" and the hoarding of vaccines.
 - Several rich countries have ordered more vaccine doses than required for their population, depriving developing economies of access to these doses.
 - There currently exists a glaring disparity in accessibility of vaccines globally.
 - Equity in access to vaccines is important for mitigating the impact of the pandemic.

Read more on [Vaccine Nationalism covered in 4th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

2. Cabinet nod for changes in juvenile law

What's in News?

The Union Cabinet has approved a slew of amendments to the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

Details:

- The amendments are aimed at strengthening the Child Protection set-up to ensure the best interest of children.
- The amendment empowers the District Magistrates (DM) to issue adoption orders as well as monitor the implementation of the law.

- These include empowering the DMs and the additional DMs to monitor the functioning of agencies responsible for implementing the JJ Act.
- The District Child Protection Units will function under the DMs.
- Before someone sets up a shelter home for children and sends their proposal for registration under the JJ Act to the State, a DM will have to assess their capacity and conduct a background check.
- A DM could also independently evaluate the functioning of the Child Welfare Committee, Special Juvenile Protection Units and registered childcare institutes.

Read more about the **Juvenile Justice Act**.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Both money bills and financial bills can be introduced in the Lok Sabha only.
2. There is no provision for a joint sitting, in case of a deadlock over the provisions in a money bill.
3. A money bill is defined by Article 110 of the Constitution.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- While a money bill can be introduced in Lok Sabha only, financial bills under Article 117 (1) can be introduced in Lok Sabha only and financial bills under Article 117 (3) can be introduced in both the houses.
- There is no provision for a joint sitting, in case of a deadlock over the provisions in a money bill.
- A money bill is defined by Article 110 of the Constitution.

Q2. Consider the following statements:

1. The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) is a global partnership launched in 2020 in the backdrop of COVID-19 pandemic to develop vaccines to stop future epidemics.
2. It was launched at the World Economic Forum.
3. India is one of the founders of CEPI.
4. It is headquartered in Oslo, Norway.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) is a global partnership launched in 2017 to develop vaccines to stop future epidemics.
- CEPI was conceived in 2015 and formally launched in 2017 at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, Switzerland.
- Founders: India, Norway, Wellcome Trust, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, World Economic Forum.
- It is headquartered in Oslo, Norway.

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Trincomalee Harbour:

1. Trincomalee Harbour is in the northeastern coast of Sri Lanka.
2. It is a natural deep-sea harbour.
3. It was formerly a British naval base.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Trincomalee Harbour, formerly a British naval base, was taken over by the Ceylonese government in 1956 to be developed as a commercial port.
- It is in the northeastern coast of Sri Lanka.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. It is a very significant pronouncement of the Supreme Court on the question of reservation of posts for backward classes.
2. It set a 50% limit on quota for reservations.
3. The concept of a creamy layer was laid down and it was directed that such a creamy layer be excluded while identifying backward classes.

The judgment being talked about is of:

- a. Puttaswamy Case
- b. Maneka Gandhi Case
- c. Indra Sawhney Case
- d. Kesavananda Bharati vs State of Kerala Case

Answer: c

Explanation:

- A nine-judge Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court had in the Indra Sawhney case capped the reservation at 50%.
- It is a very significant pronouncement of the Supreme Court on the question of reservation of posts for backward classes.
- The concept of a creamy layer was laid down and it was directed that such a creamy layer be excluded while identifying backward classes.

Read more on [Indra Sawhney Case](#).

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss the growing human rights violations with respect to minority Tamils in Sri Lanka. Evaluate how India's interference in this issue may affect the already strained ties between both countries. (15 Marks, 250 Words) [GS-2, International Relations]
2. Vaccine nationalism poses the risk of the COVID-19 virus becoming endemic. In the light of this statement, discuss the strategy to be adopted to deal with the ever-evolving virus. (15 Marks, 250 Words) [GS-2, Health]