

# 19 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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*Nothing here for today!!!*

## B. GS 2 Related

### Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

#### 1. Facebook news goes dark in Australia

##### Context:

In a strong pushback to Australia's new media bargaining laws, Facebook has decided to black out news content from its social networking platform in Australia.

##### What is Australia's media bargaining law?

- Australia's new media bargaining code was introduced in parliament in December 2020.
- It requires big tech companies like Google and Facebook to enter into agreements with news outlets that result in a commercial contract for showing the latter's content on their platforms.

##### Why does Facebook have an issue with the code?

- Google and Facebook have engaged in desperate attempts to avoid regulation under the Australian government's proposed mandatory news media bargaining code.
- The code would force them to pay Australian news companies for content that appears on their platforms.
- It also requires they abide by certain minimum standards, including informing media companies about the type of data collected through users' interactions with news, and providing advance notice of any algorithmic changes that affect news content.

##### How does the deal impact Facebook?

- Not much, as Facebook says that news makes up less than 4% of the content people see in their news feed.
- Over the years, Facebook has been less interested in news as it has moved towards softer and more engaging video content that could drive conversations within a network.
- Also, its experience with the way news feeds were gamed during the 2016 US presidential elections has made it wary of becoming a large platform for news.

##### What does this mean for the rest of the world?

- Facebook and Google rightly fear the action in Australia could trigger similar laws across the world.
- They might move towards making the inflow of news into its platforms more contractual.

### Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

#### 1. Biometric authentication to benefit farmers: Centre

**Context:**

The Centre is encouraging the States to deploy biometric authentication of farmers.

**Details:**

- The practice has already been adopted in Uttar Pradesh.
- It is set to be rolled out in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Odisha.

**Significance:**

- It would cut out the middleman and ensure greater transparency in the procurement of farm produce.
- It will aid in tracking the end-use beneficiary.
- This initiative would reduce the need for extensive paperwork, prevent leakages and speed up the process of procurement, with payment settlement being completed within 72 hours.
- The other advantage is that the farmer gets a receipt for his goods, showing the quantity and the **MSP** price, so nobody can cheat the farmer.

## C. GS 3 Related

### Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

#### 1. 'Polluted air killed 54,000 in Delhi'

**Context:**

According to a Greenpeace Southeast Asia analysis of the cost to the economy due to air pollution, air pollution claimed approximately 54,000 lives in Delhi in 2020.

**Details:**

- Six Indian cities: Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad and Lucknow feature in the global analysis.
- The 'Cost Estimator', an online tool that estimates the real-time health impact and economic cost from fine particulate matter (PM 2.5) air pollution in major world cities, was deployed in a collaboration between Greenpeace Southeast Asia, IQAir and the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA).

**Concerns:**

- Globally, approximately 1,60,000 deaths have been attributed to PM (particulate matter) 2.5 air pollution in the five most populous cities — Delhi, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Shanghai and Tokyo.
- An estimated 25,000 avoidable deaths in Mumbai in 2020 have been attributed to air pollution.
- The report states that the damage is equally worrying in other Indian cities.
- In 2020, Greenpeace said that of the 28 global cities studied, Delhi bore the highest economic cost of air pollution with an estimated loss of 24,000 lives in the first half of 2020 despite a strict COVID-19 lockdown.

**Cost to Economy:**

- To show the impact of air pollution-related deaths on the economy, the approach used by Greenpeace is called 'willingness-to-pay' — a lost life year or a year lived with disability is converted to money by the amount that people are willing to pay in order to avoid this negative outcome.
- The cost estimator also sustained the estimated air pollution-related economic losses of ₹1,23,65,15,40,000.

#### **Suggestions:**

- Despite a temporary reprieve in air quality owing to the lockdown, the latest figures from the report underscore the need to act immediately.
- It stressed that the need of the hour is to rapidly scale up renewable energy, bring an end to fossil fuel emissions and boost sustainable transport systems.

### **Category: SECURITY**

#### **1. More roads on Arunachal border**

##### **Context:**

The Union government has given the go-ahead for critical infrastructure development in Arunachal Pradesh at an estimated cost of more than ₹1,100 crore.

##### **Details:**

- The pace of development along the China border had picked up after 2014. Many projects including motorable roads, mule tracks and facilities for porters have been sanctioned along the China border and the construction is taking place at a fast pace.
- Most projects are earmarked in areas along the China border in the north and northeast part of Arunachal.
- In 2020, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), headed by Prime Minister cleared a proposal for the development of critical infrastructure in Arunachal Pradesh at a cost of ₹1162.19 crore.
- Also, the CCS had cleared a proposal for the construction of 32 roads under phase II of the Indo-China Border Roads (ICBR) scheme.
  - The roads are to come up in Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh.

##### **Issue:**

- China has made rapid strides in the border areas of Arunachal by setting up new villages and road networks.

## **D. GS 4 Related**

***Nothing here for today!!!***

## **E. Editorials**

### **Category: ECONOMY**

## 1. Dizzying climb

### Context:

- Latest **retail inflation**.

### Details:

- The **Consumer Price Index (CPI)** has risen by **4.06%** in January 2021.
- This marks a **16-month low in inflation rate** and also marks a deceleration for a second straight month.
- Inflation had been above the Reserve Bank of India's upper tolerance threshold of 6% for six months through November.

### Factors contributing to low inflation:

- The lower inflation rate has been helped by an appreciable **softening in food prices**.
- The Consumer Food Price Index has risen by a mere **1.89%** as vegetable prices saw a disinflation of 15.8% and cereal prices have eased considerably given the **bumper Kharif crop and rising prospects of a good Rabi harvest**.

### Risks to inflation:

- Despite the considerable decrease in inflation rates, the outlook is far from reassuring.

### **Protein inflation:**

- The inflation rate of pulses and edible oils continues to remain high. Eggs and meat and fish, key sources of protein have registered double-digit inflation rates.

### **Supply-side squeeze:**

- The rising input costs for multiple sectors in the real economy (automobile manufacturers, builders) are a cause of concern.
- The **rising raw material costs** would force them to pass on the impact to the end consumers.
- The latest **IHS Markit India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI)** points to the sharpest increase in purchasing costs for more than two years due to supply-side squeeze.

### **Increasing fuel costs:**

- The continuously **rising transportation fuel prices** to newer and newer record highs in recent days also make the outlook for inflation grim.
- Diesel, the main fuel for freight carriage, has now exceeded Rs. 80 per litre and is bound to have an impact on the prices of goods being transported across distances — from fresh produce to intermediate and finished industrial goods.

### **Waning of the favourable base effect:**

- The favourable base effect is beginning to wane meaning it will become increasingly unlikely to have a steep decline in inflation rates.
- The base effect is the distortion in a monthly inflation figure that results from abnormally high or low levels of inflation in the year-ago month.
- The **base effect relates to inflation in the corresponding period of the previous year**, if the inflation rate was too low in the corresponding period of the previous year, even a smaller rise in the Price Index will arithmetically give a high rate of inflation now. On the other hand, if the price index had risen at a high rate in the corresponding period of the previous year and recorded a high inflation rate, a similar absolute increase in the price index now will show a lower inflation rate now.
- A base effect can make it difficult to accurately assess inflation levels over time. It diminishes over time if inflation levels are relatively constant.

#### **High liquidity in financial system:**

- The **fiscal stimulus** undertaken to deal with the economic impact of the pandemic has resulted in high liquidity in the financial system. This increased supply of money in the system could aid inflation rate rise.

#### **Conclusion:**

- High inflation rates do not augur well for post-COVID economic recovery given that the **demand has not stabilized from the impact of the pandemic**.
- Policymakers need to maintain a strict vigil to keep inflation from resurging and posing a threat to **macro-economic stability**.

## **Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY**

### **1. Make peace with nature now**

#### **Context:**

- The three environmental crises facing humans — **climate change; nature loss; and the pollution of air, soil and water**.

#### **Details:**

- Human activity has been degrading nature.
- Anthropogenic activity in the form of unsustainable use of natural resources has led to mass species extinctions and is leading to pollution of air and water. The increasing Green House Gas emissions have resulted in climate change.
- These human actions are not only detrimental to the planet and other species but are also equally **detrimental to humans themselves**.
- The **per capita stock of natural capital** (the resources and services nature provides to humanity) has fallen by 40% in just over two decades.
- **Nine out of 10 people worldwide breathe polluted air**. This is causing millions of premature deaths.



- Despite overwhelming evidence available to establish the unsustainable activities of humans and the increasing calls to rectify, yet the actions of the governments, financial institutions, businesses and individuals are falling short of what is needed to protect current and future generation interests.
- The **UN Environment Programme (UNEP)** notes that despite a dip in greenhouse gas emissions caused by the pandemic, the **world is still headed for global warming of more than 3°C by the end of the century.**

#### Way forward:

##### **Integrated approach:**

- Mankind's **environmental, social and economic challenges** are interlinked. They must be tackled together.
- The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 would require climate action given that climate change and ecosystem collapse are undermining food and water supplies in the world's poorest countries.

##### **Enhancing climate action:**

- The number of countries promising to work towards net-zero emissions currently stands at 126. The nations should seek to further **stretch their nationally determined contributions** and immediately **kickstart the transitions to net-zero.**
- At the upcoming climate COP, governments must also finally agree on the rules for a **global carbon trading market.**
- The **\$100 billion global climate fund** under which the developed countries promised to provide financial help to developing nations to cope with the impacts of climate change must be operationalized.

##### **Transformation of economy:**

- There is the need to move towards **circular economic systems** that reuse resources and thus reduce emissions.
- The government should focus on **green growth** and invest in sectors such as renewable energy, social infrastructure, etc. Governments should invest in nature-positive farming and clean energy and water.
- They must create opportunities for future industries that generate prosperity. They must also ensure that **transitions are fair and equitable, creating jobs for those who lose out.**

##### **Societal effort:**

- Addressing our planetary emergency is a whole-of-society effort with the governments taking the lead.
- There is the need for a radical transformation of our societies by valuing nature and putting its health at the heart of all our decisions. People should work towards **shrinking their environmental footprint.**
- Climate action should be a **participatory effort** with the citizens given a voice in the far-reaching decisions regarding climate action.

### Additional Information:

#### **Making Peace with Nature report:**

- The **UN has released the Making Peace with Nature report.**
- The report pulls together all the evidence of environmental decline from major global scientific assessments, with the most advanced ideas on how to reverse it.
- This report would act as a **blueprint for a sustainable future** that can secure human well-being on a healthy planet.

## **Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

### **1. The pressing need to adjudicate, not mediate**

#### Context:

- The recent judgment of the Supreme Court that **refused to review its earlier verdict on the Shaheen Bagh protest.**

Also read: [Important Supreme Court Judgements for UPSC](#)

#### Background:

- The Supreme Court in the Shaheen Bagh case had declared that there is **no absolute right to protest**, and it could be subjected to the orders of the authority regarding the place and time.

#### Concerns:

- The article argues against the stand taken by the Supreme Court based on the following factors.

#### **Problematic balancing:**

- In the original judgment on Shaheen Bagh, the Court attempted to “mediate” the issue. The textbook theory of **“balancing” the right to protest and the right to move along the road** did not help find a solution to the problem.
- Instead of fulfilling its duty to adjudicate on the issue, the court attempted mediation.
- **A reconciliatory approach cannot be a substitute for judicial assertion.** The judiciary should ensure timely adjudication of the validity of the laws which are questioned by the process recognised by the law.
- The review petition provided the Supreme Court an opportunity to revisit its earlier folly but has failed to capitalize on it.

#### **Abusive judicial review:**

- In the review petition, the petitioners rightly apprehended that the observations in the earlier judgment against the indefinite occupation of public space “may prove to be a license in the hands of the police to commit atrocities on legitimate voice of protest”.
- The Court, by its present rejection of the plea, seems to have reinforced the state’s stand. It illustrates an **instance of “abusive judicial review”, as described by David Landau and**



**Rosalind Dixon**, where the Court not only refuses to act as the umpire of democracy but aids the executive in fulfilling its strategies. In the process, it legitimises very many illegitimate state actions.

#### Against judicial precedent:

- The 2020 verdict fails to properly appreciate and contextualise the earlier Constitution Bench judgment in **Himat Lal K. Shah vs Commissioner of Police** (1972) even after referring to it.
- In Himat Lal K. Shah, the Court said that the rule framed by the Ahmedabad Police Commissioner conferred arbitrary power on the police officers in the matter of public meetings and, therefore, was liable to be struck down. The judges on the bench noted that “**freedom of assembly is an essential element of a democratic system**” and that “**the public streets are the ‘natural’ places for expression of opinion and dissemination of ideas**”.

#### Conclusion:

#### Need judicial review:

- A fair and effective adjudicative mechanism in constitutional matters can help end the agitations and protests.
- Studies have shown that social movements could be less radical and less oppositional when the issues could be effectively sorted out by way of fair litigative means.
- The court's only role is to act as the **guardian of the right of people including the right to dissent**.
  - Article 19 of the Constitution deals with the right to liberty including freedom of expression to that of peaceful association.

## F. Prelims Facts

### 1. Hyderabad wins global ‘Tree City’ status

#### What's in News?

Hyderabad has won a green contest among cities in India, and emerged as one of the ‘Tree Cities of the World’.

- That title has been bestowed by the Arbor Day Foundation and the [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#).
- Hyderabad has been selected for its commitment to growing and maintaining urban forestry.
- It has been recognised for the State government's Haritha Haram programme and its Urban Forest Parks plan.

### 2. L&T delivers 100th K9 Vajra howitzer to Army

#### What's in News?

Army Chief Gen flagged off the 100th K9 Vajra.

- It is a tracked self-propelled howitzer built by Larsen & Toubro (L&T).

- As a part of its 'Make-in-India' initiative, the company established a green-field manufacturing-cum-integration and testing facility at its Hazira manufacturing complex near Surat to produce the guns.
- It was built at L&T's armoured system complex at Hazira in Gujarat.

## 1. Quad meet: India, U.S. call for rule of law in Myanmar

### What's in News?

A ministerial meeting of the Quad grouping comprising its member nations India, Australia, Japan and the United States.

- The leaders discussed the military crackdown in Myanmar and called for rule of law in Myanmar.

**This issue has been covered in 5<sup>th</sup> February 2021 and 12<sup>th</sup> February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.**

## 2. Let industry help with vaccine roll-out: CII

### What's in News?

Stating that the expiry of vaccines could be a concern, the Confederation of Indian Industry urged the government to allow the private sector to help with vaccine roll-out.

- CII has urged the government to allow private-sector health providers to administer vaccines and let businesses inoculate their employees and communities around their operations.
- It said that this could help vaccinate 100 million people and allow the Centre to reach identified target priority groups quicker, which would be critical to get the workforce back to work and the economy back on track.
- It stressed that, by opening the vaccination process to the private sector, the large cohort of those willing to take the vaccines would enable full utilisation of the vaccines within the expiry period.

## H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

**Q1. Consider the following statements:**

1. Hyderabad has been bestowed with the 'Tree Cities of the World' title.
2. Haritha Haram is a large-scale tree-planting program implemented by the Government of Telangana to increase the amount of tree cover in the state.

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

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

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

- Hyderabad has been bestowed with the 'Tree Cities of the World' title.
- The southern city is the only one from India to get recognition for its commitment to growing and maintaining the urban forest.
- Haritha Haram is a large-scale tree-planting program implemented by the Government of Telangana to increase the amount of tree cover in the state.

**Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Arunachal Pradesh:**

1. It is the largest of the Seven Sister States of Northeast India by area.
2. It shares the longest border with Myanmar.
3. Indian Grey Hornbill is its state bird.

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

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

**Answer: c**

**Explanation:**

- Arunachal Pradesh is the largest of the Seven Sister States of Northeast India by area.
- Arunachal shares its longest border with China, followed by Myanmar and Bhutan.
- The Great Hornbill is the state bird of Arunachal Pradesh.

**Q3. Consider the following statements:**

1. The first delimitation exercise was conducted by the Indian President in 1950-51.
2. The Delimitation Commission is a high-level body appointed by the President.
3. The present delimitation of constituencies has been done on the basis of the 2001 census under the provisions of the Delimitation Act, 2002.

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

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

**Answer: d**

**Explanation:**

All the statements are correct.

**Q4. Consider the following statements:**

1. The QUAD is an informal strategic forum between the United States, Japan, Australia and India.
2. The idea of QUAD was first mooted by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2017.
3. Exercise Malabar originally began as an exercise between the QUAD members.

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

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

**Answer: b**

**Explanation:**

- The QUAD is an informal strategic forum between the United States, Japan, Australia and India.
- The idea was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007.
- Exercise Malabar originally began in 1992 as a bilateral exercise between India and the United States, Japan became a permanent partner in 2015. With Australia's participation in the exercise in 2020, it was the first time in 13 years that all members of the regional grouping known as the Quad engaged militarily.

## I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Despite the considerable decrease in inflation rates, the outlook for inflation is far from reassuring. Comment. Also discuss the significance of inflation in ensuring macroeconomic stability in the post-COVID scenario. (10 marks, 150 words) [GS-3, Economy]
2. In the light of the existential threat posed by the three environmental crises – climate change; nature loss; and the pollution of air, soil and water, discuss the measures to be taken to secure human well-being on a healthy planet. (15 marks, 250 words) [GS-3, Environment and Ecology]