

05 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [T.N. Governor declines to take call on Perarivalan](#)

Context:

- Tamil Nadu Governor has refrained from taking a call on a plea for the early release of Rajiv Gandhi assassination case convict A.G. Perarivalan.

- He opined that the President was the appropriate competent authority to deal with Perarivalan's request for freedom.

Background:

This issue has been covered in [22nd January 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Read more about [Pardoning Power of the Governor](#) and [Pardoning Powers of President](#).

2. Centre ready to introduce Bill defining Delhi govt., L-G powers

Context:

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) is all set to introduce legislation in the Budget session of the Parliament to amend a 1991 act pertaining to the powers and functions of the Delhi government and the Lieutenant Governor.

Issue:

The Aam Aadmi Party-led Delhi government is often at loggerheads with the Centre regarding administrative matters in the Capital.

Details:

- The bill is likely to give more teeth to the L-G's office.
- The Bill is likely to clearly define the powers of the L-G and the Delhi government on the lines of the Supreme Court judgment of February 2019.
- A clutch of petitions was filed in the Supreme Court against a 2015 notification by the MHA, which said that the Delhi government had no powers in services-related matters and the Anti-Corruption Branch could not register cases against any employee, officer or functionary of the Central government.
 - In the February 14, 2019 verdict, the court upheld as "legal" the MHA's notification:
 - authorising the L-G to exercise powers in relation to services,
 - directing the Anti-Corruption Branch (ACB) police not to take cognisance of offences against Central government officials.
 - The apex court confirmed the Delhi High Court's finding that the ACB's jurisdiction is confined to Delhi officials and statutory bodies and does not extend to Central government officials.
- The apex court is still examining the services matter.

- In 2018, a five-judge Bench of the SC had unanimously held that the L-G was bound by the “aid and advice” of the Delhi government and both had to work harmoniously with each other.
- Recently, the MHA notified rules for the newly created Union Territory of J&K.
 - In it, it said that in case of difference of opinion between the L-G and a Minister when no agreement could be reached even after a month, the decision of the Lieutenant Governor shall be deemed to have been accepted by the Council of Ministers.

Note:-

- The Union Territory of Delhi with a Legislative Assembly came into being in 1991 under Article 239AA inserted by the ‘Constitution (Sixty-ninth Amendment) Act, 1991’.
- It said that the UT of Delhi shall be called the National Capital Territory of Delhi, and the administrator thereof appointed under Article 239 shall be designated as the Lieutenant-Governor.
- According to the existing Act, the Legislative Assembly of Delhi has the power to make laws in all matters except public order, police, and land.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. ICC convicts Ugandan rebel commander for war crimes

Context:

The International Criminal Court has convicted a Ugandan child soldier-turned-Lord’s Resistance Army commander of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Details:

- Dominic Ongwen was found guilty of 61 charges over a reign of terror in the early 2000s, including the first conviction by the ICC for the crime of forced pregnancy.
- Ongwen, nicknamed “White Ant”, was convicted of charges including murder, rape, sexual enslavement and the conscription of child soldiers.
- The court said Ongwen ordered attacks on refugee camps as a senior commander in the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA).

Lord’s Resistance Army:

- The LRA was founded three decades ago by former Catholic altar boy and self-styled prophet Kony. The group originated in Northern Uganda as a movement to fight for the rights of the Acholi people.

- Joseph Kony waged a bloody campaign in four African nations to set up a state based on the Bible's Ten Commandments.
- He launched a bloody rebellion in northern Uganda against President Yoweri Museveni.
- The United Nations says the LRA killed more than 1,00,000 people and abducted 60,000 children in a campaign of violence that spread to three other African nations — Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic.

Human Rights Watch said the case was a landmark in achieving justice for victims of the Lord's Resistance Army.

International Criminal Court (ICC):

- The International Criminal Court (ICC) is an intergovernmental organisation and international tribunal headquartered in The Hague.
- It investigates and tries people charged with serious and grave crimes such as genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression.
- It is the first permanent international criminal court in the world.

Read more on [ICC](#).

Category: ECONOMY

1. 'This is the highest capex ever over a 2-year period'

Context:

Expenditure Secretary has said that the Centre had been very careful and realistic in its expenditure and receipts projections for FY-22, and that its push for capital expenditure was the largest ever over a two-year period.

Details:

- Spending had expanded in FY-21 and the expansion has been sustained into FY-22.
- In FY-22 though, the incremental expenditure isn't high, the composition changes very substantially.
 - FY-21 had a big weight of welfare schemes and subsidies, and in FY-22, many of those one-time expenditures would disappear and get replaced by capital expenditure.
- The capital expenditure is 34.5% above 2020-21's Budget Estimates and 26.5% over the Revised Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

- Capital expenditure or capex is the money spent to buy, maintain, or improve the government's fixed assets.
- The expenditures are incurred for long term benefits.
- These expenditures serve the purpose of increasing the capacity or capabilities of the long term asset by either enhancing or adding new assets.
- Capital expenditure is the part of the government spending that goes into the creation of assets like schools, colleges, hospitals, roads, bridges, dams, railway lines, airports and seaports. Capital expenditure also covers the acquisition of equipment and machinery by the government, including those for defence purposes. Capital expenditure also includes investment by the government that yields profits or dividend in future.

Why is Capital Expenditure important?

- High capital expenditure usually means more investment by the government towards the creation of infrastructure and other assets that are crucial for rapid economic growth.
- Higher capital expenditure would result in the development of physical and social infrastructure - the key to achieving high economic growth.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. An inevitable showdown

Context:

The Union government had issued a notice to Twitter to comply with its order of removal of content related to 'farmer genocide'. The Government has threatened Twitter with penal action for not complying with its orders.

This topic has been covered in [4th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- The Ministry of Electronics and IT ordered 257 URLs and one hashtag to be blocked on the grounds that they were spreading dangerous misinformation about the protests.
- Twitter initially complied with the order but then restored these tweets and handles, which included those of media houses.
- The Government's initial order was issued under Section 69A of the [Information Technology Act, 2000](#).
- This is the same Section under which hundreds of Chinese apps have been banned in recent months.

Concern:

- Across the world, technology platforms have enough safeguards to act as intermediaries without being liable for the content that is published.
- But Twitter's act of defying the orders as per the IT law means it is on slippery territory.
- Though the use of Section 69A has been often criticised for the secrecy surrounding the process, it was upheld by the Supreme Court in the landmark *Shreya Singhal vs Union of India* (2015).
 - The Court then was satisfied with the safeguards available.
- The recent development marks a critical point in an already uneasy relationship between a powerful government and an influential technology platform.
- Twitter's stance may even lead to a legal challenge to the provisions of the Section.
- On the other hand, the hashtag that the government wanted blocked is indefensible on the grounds of freedom of speech.

Conclusion:

What further happens in this face-off will be of interest not just for the two parties but for the governments of the world as well as the platforms of the world.

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. A year on, mind the gaps in the pandemic response

January 30, 2021, marked one year since India detected its first case of COVID-19. Till date the country has recorded the second largest in the world in terms of cases, after the United States, and fourth in terms of deaths.

India versus the world:

- Official statistics show that India has fared better on rates of infections and deaths than many higher-income countries.

- India's case fatality ratio stood at 1.4% compared to 2.8% in the United Kingdom or 3.1% in South Africa.
 - India's deaths per million is 112, compared to 1,362 in the United States, 1,486 in Italy, or 1,831 in Belgium.
- However, India has not done so well compared to countries of similar income and demography in South Asia.
 - India's case fatalities ratio was significantly higher than Bhutan (0.1%), Nepal (0.7%), the Maldives (0.3%) and Sri Lanka (0.5%).
 - Deaths due to COVID-19 per million population in Bangladesh (50), Pakistan (54) and Sri Lanka (16) is lower than in India.
- India was also among the few countries to announce a stringent nationwide lockdown much before it had a significant number of cases.
 - The U.K. and the U.S. hesitated to impose a lockdown, costing many lives due to their late response.
- India's initial response was marked by political commitment at the highest level.
 - Several steps were taken early in screening international travellers.
 - Inbound traffic from severely affected countries was restricted.
 - Quarantine facilities were set up for those testing positive.

Where did India lack?

- Like many other countries, India has not been able to figure out till now what the best way to open its borders to normal travellers is while keeping out those carrying COVID-19 infection, particularly the new more virulent strains.
- The lockdown was also marked by excessive dependence on security forces to ensure enforcement of physical distancing measures and quarantine-related restrictions.
- An unintended offshoot of the lockdown was the large-scale exodus of migrants and families forced to walk hundreds of kilometres back to their homes in the countryside.
 - Dozens died in the exodus, with many in horrific road accidents.
 - There were also deaths due to lack of sufficient food, drinking water and the sheer stress of travelling.
 - Their plight highlighted the lack of a social safety-net for poor Indians both from before as well as during the pandemic.
- The response was also marked by a lack of involvement of civil society organisations as partners with state agencies.

Lessons Learnt:

- In the context of the country's federal structure, no public health response can be successful without ownership at the state level.

- The lack of consultation with State governments saw many of them implementing response policies hesitantly without much initiative or innovation.
 - This experience has not yet prompted any rethink of the top-down approach towards States at the national level.
- In all epidemic responses, generation and use of strategic information play a crucial role.
 - Given India's global reputation as a software superpower, the pandemic would have been an ideal staging ground for fast-tracking plans to create an integrated digital health information system to improve the efficiency and transparency of the COVID-19 response.
 - The Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP), India's national disease surveillance framework, was not visible throughout the response.
 - While the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) carried out selective sero-surveillance studies in metropolitan areas, these surveys were limited in coverage and periodicity.
 - It is therefore still a matter of guesswork as to what percentage of India's population have been infected with the virus — an indicator of herd immunity.

Way forward:

- Analysing India's response to the novel coronavirus pandemic so far reveals a mixed bag of successes and failures along with a host of unknowns looming ahead.
- A few issues urgently need to be addressed to both limit damage due to the pandemic and get back to the path of economic and social recovery.
- There is a need for a rethink of the top-down approach towards States at the national level for public health response policies.
- There is a need for Civil Society Organisations to proactively participate in pandemic response.
 - It goes to the credit of many civil society organisations that they voluntarily stepped into the response and played a meaningful role in providing social support and lobbying with funding organisations such as the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) to provide social support to affected families.
- As India joins the select group of vaccine-producing countries, there is light at the end of the tunnel.
- The end game strategy for the vaccination programme remains unclear, raising questions about whether its benefits will be sustainable in the long term.
- Another critical unknown in India's COVID-19 response is over its plans to revive the economy and restore livelihoods of millions of people.
 - Many are today in danger of starvation and for whom even basic health care has become unaffordable.
 - The pandemic period has exacerbated existing social inequalities and the poor face a challenge which needs to be addressed on priority.

Conclusion:

- There is an urgent need to examine all these critical gaps in the response to the pandemic, whether they occurred through acts of omission or commission.
- Without such an open inquiry and widespread debate, India will miss yet another chance to learn the right lessons and ensure a more robust, well-thought-out and humane response to similar crises in future.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The way forward in Myanmar

Context:

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

This topic has been covered in [3rd February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#). Also read about India's stakes in the current issue covered in the editorial [Setback in Myanmar](#).

Details:

There are several lessons to be learnt from the country's tortuous politics.

1. The developments in Myanmar will bring back the old debate around the prudence of sanctions.
 - 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.
 - Notwithstanding the western sanctions before 2010, China, Thailand and Singapore were the key trading partners of Myanmar. The present reality is no different.
 - Given that the military has been able to economically withstand sanctions by striking deals with Asian countries in the past, sanctions are unlikely to bring any major political change.
2. The limited European trade with Myanmar that started after 2010 benefits the poor — the European Union's 'Everything But Arms' scheme targets the poor in Myanmar's garment industry.
 - The scheme allows the world's least-developed countries, such as Myanmar, to export most goods to the EU free of duties.
3. The old debate around the need for accountability for crimes against humanity will resurface.

- As political changes got underway in 2010, many generals, such as Than Shwe, who was the de-facto head of Myanmar from 1992 to 2011 and was on the radar of the international community for perpetuating a regime of human rights abuses, quietly vanished from the scene. This bred a culture of impunity.
- During the 2017 Rohingya crisis, senior military officials openly exploited social media to mobilise public support for brutality against Rohingyas.

Way Forward:

1. A critical international player in Myanmar is China.
 - China has appointed specific envoys for Asian affairs, who are de-facto working on Myanmar-related issues since 2013.
 - The international community, particularly the West, has to factor in China's multi-layered influence on Myanmar.
2. Many international mechanisms comprising Western and Asian countries that were formed to coordinate strategies on Myanmar were disbanded after the 2015 election.
 - Relevant actors should be brought on a common platform by reviving past mechanisms.
3. The expectation that Myanmar will see a nationwide protest against the Tatmadaw after the coup, needs to be examined with the geographical extent of Bamar (Myanmar's largest ethnic group, who support the National League for Democracy).
 - The minorities in the country form around 35% of the population.
 - In the current scenario, the military will continue to exploit ethnic and religious fault lines.
 - Engagement with domestic stakeholders, including ethnic minorities, especially from the north, should be pursued by the international community.

Conclusion:

The international community must remember that no change is irreversible, particularly in a context where military leadership scripted the meaning of democracy, domestic forces, as well as geopolitics, continuously fail to deter its actions and impulses to rule.

F. Tidbits

1. India strikes cautious note on developments in Myanmar

What's in News?

India struck a cautious note on the developments in Myanmar saying it continues to monitor the situation.

- Spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs said “India and Myanmar are neighbours with close cultural and people-to-people ties, bolstered by trade, economic, security and defence-related exchanges. We are therefore monitoring the developments closely. We are also engaged on the issue as a member of the U.N. Security Council.”.
- India had earlier expressed deep concern after the military takeover was first reported from Myanmar and asked for maintenance of the rule of law and the democratic process.

G. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Lord’s Resistance Army’s activities are spread across which of these African Nations?

1. Uganda
2. Central African Republic
3. Nigeria
4. Sudan
5. Congo

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The LRA was founded three decades ago by a former Catholic altar boy and self-styled prophet Kony. The group originated in Northern Uganda as a movement to fight for the rights of the Acholi people.
- Joseph Kony waged a bloody campaign in four African nations to set up a state based on the Bible’s Ten Commandments.
- The Lord’s Resistance Army is a rebel group led by leader Joseph Kony.

- LRA's activities are spread across Uganda, Congo, South Sudan, and the Central African Republic.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Micro Irrigation Fund (MIF):

1. The fund was set up under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY).
2. It was instituted with NABARD with an initial corpus of Rs. 5000 crore.
3. The fund is to be accessed by individual farmers only.

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

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Micro Irrigation Fund (MIF) was set up with [NABARD](#) under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) for facilitating the States to mobilize additional resources for expanding coverage of Micro Irrigation.
- The fund is to be accessed by the State Government and not by individual farmers.
- The fund was set up under Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY).
- It was instituted with NABARD with an initial corpus of Rs. 5000 crore.

Q3. What is the primary objective of the KAPILA campaign launched by the government?

- a. Intellectual Property Literacy and patent awareness.
- b. Promoting STEM Careers for Women.
- c. Ensuring good prices to the jute farmers.
- d. Forming SHGs and developing the skills of people in rural areas to promote self-employment.

Answer: a

Explanation:

The government has launched a campaign namely Kalam Program for Intellectual Property Literacy and Awareness Campaign (KAPILA) for Intellectual Property Literacy and creating patent awareness.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to National Safety Council (NSC):

1. National Safety Council (NSC) was set up by the Ministry of Health in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. It is an apex not-for-profit tripartite body.
3. The chairperson of the NSC is nominated by the government.

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. 2 only

Answer: b

Explanation:

- National Safety Council (NSC) was set up by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India (GOI) in 1966 to generate, develop and sustain a voluntary movement on Safety, Health and Environment (SHE) at the national level.
- It is an apex not-for-profit tripartite body, registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 and the Bombay Public Trust Act, 1950.
- The chairperson of the NSC is nominated by the government and is generally an eminent industrialist.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the light of India's experience of handling the COVID-19 pandemic, discuss the need to revisit the disease control strategy to ensure a more robust and humane response in similar crises. (15 Marks 250 Words) [GS-2, Governance]
2. In the backdrop of various instances of misinformation being spread on social media during protests, turning them violent, discuss how the government can strike a balance between National Security and Freedom of Speech. (15 Marks, 250 Words) [GS-2, Polity and Governance]