

08 Feb 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Protests sweep across Myanmar, Internet access restored partially](#)

Context:

Tens of thousands of protesters have taken to streets across Myanmar in the biggest anti-coup rallies yet.

This topic has been covered in [3rd February 2021](#) and [5th February 2021](#) Comprehensive News Analysis.

2. U.S. must lift curbs before Iran rejoins nuclear deal: Khamenei

Context:

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said that the U.S. must completely lift sanctions first, followed by verification by Tehran, before the Islamic republic returns to its nuclear deal commitments.

- Recently, Iran's President ruled out changes to Iran's nuclear accord with world powers and dismissed calls to broaden the terms of the deal and include regional countries.

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

C. GS 3 Related

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. 7 killed after 'glacial burst' in Uttarakhand

Context:

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

- It was described as a "glacial burst" by the Centre's National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC).

National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC)

- A National Crisis Management Committee is a committee set up by the Government of India in the wake of a natural calamity for effective coordination and implementation of relief measures and operations.
- It deals with major crises which have serious or national ramifications.
- It is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary.
- Its functions are to oversee the Command, Control and Coordination of the disaster response; giving direction to the Crisis Management Group (CMG).

What is glacial burst?

- A glacial outburst is an uncommon event that occurs when the water dammed by a glacier or moraine is released.
- The glacier containing the body of water melts and overflows the glacier.
- Retreating glaciers, like several in the Himalayas, usually result in the formation of lakes at their tips, called proglacial lakes, often bound only by sediments and boulders.
 - If the boundaries of these lakes are breached, it can lead to large amounts of water rushing down to nearby streams and rivers, gathering momentum on the way by picking up sediments, rocks and other material, and resulting in flooding downstream.
- Glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) events are not unusual, but their impact depends on the size of the proglacial lake that burst, and location.
 - The breach can be caused by several reasons — in this particular case, an avalanche was reported in the region two days ago.
 - Other causes could be earthquake, heavy rainfall, snowmelt, longterm dam degradation, etc.

Impact:

- The glacial burst led to the rising of water levels in the river Rishiganga, which washed away the Rishiganga small hydro project of 13.2 MW.
- The flash flood also affected the downstream hydro project of NTPC at Tapovan on the river Dhauliganga (which is a tributary of the river Alaknanda).
 - Tapovan-Vishnugad project has an installed capacity of 520 MW.
- It led to rippling flash floods in the Dhauliganga and the Rishiganga and also impacted the Alaknanda.
- One motorable road and four suspension bridges connecting around eight villages in the area with the district headquarters have also been washed away by the avalanche.

Dhauliganga

- Dhauliganga originates from Vasudhara Tal, perhaps the largest glacial lake in Uttarakhand.
 - It flows in a meandering course, which takes it through the Nanda Devi National Park.
- Dhauliganga is joined by Rishiganga river at Raini, where the disaster at the power project dam took place.
- The river takes a V-turn and continues to flow in the opposite direction, toward north as the Dhauliganga for another 30-odd km, through Tapovan, until it is joined by the Alaknanda at Vishnuprayag near Joshimath.

What triggered the glacial burst?

- Scientists are not sure what triggered the sudden surge of water near Chamoli in Uttarakhand.
 - Such a glacial burst is an extremely rare event.
 - They suspect the impact of climate change or development.
 - Environmental experts attributed the Nanda Devi glacial melt to global warming.
 - Climate change has driven erratic weather patterns like increased snowfall and rainfall, and warmer winters had led to the melting of a lot of snow.
 - According to the latest assessment reports of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Glacier retreat and permafrost thaw are projected to decrease the stability of the mountain slopes and increase the number and area of glacier lakes.
 - It is also predicted that the number and area of glacier lakes will continue to increase in most regions in the coming decades, and new lakes will develop closer to steep and potentially unstable mountain walls, where lake outbursts can be more easily triggered.
 - What scientists are certain of is that the incident was not a result of any glacier breaking off. In fact, glaciers are not known to break in a manner that ice-sheets in the polar regions do.

Measures taken:

Rescue:

- Dams in Shrinagar and Rishikesh were emptied out.
- People along riverbanks were evacuated.
- Apart from the local police and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), four columns of the Army were also deployed for rescue operations.

Relief:

- The Prime Minister approved ex-gratia of Rs. 2 lakh each from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund for the next of kin of those who have lost their lives in the disaster.

Read more about Prime Minister's National Relief Fund covered in [11th January 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Major natural disasters in the region over the past three decades:

When the hills shake Major natural disasters in the region over the past three decades:



Nature's fury: Part of a glacier broke off in Joshimath in Uttarakhand's Chamoli district on Sunday, causing a massive flood in the Dhaul Ganga river. ■ PTI

1991: Uttarkashi earthquake — An earthquake of 6.8 magnitude hit the undivided state of Uttar Pradesh in October 1991. At least 768 people were killed and thousands of homes destroyed

1998: Malpa landslide — The small village of Malpa was wiped out in a landslide in which nearly 255 people, including 55 Kailash Mansarovar pilgrims, were killed. The resulting debris partially blocked Sharda river

1999: Chamoli earthquake — An earthquake of 6.8 magnitude hit Chamoli district killing over 100 people. The adjoining Rudrapur district was also heavily affected. Several ground deformations were reported as a result of the earthquake, and landslips and changes in water flow were recorded. Cracks were observed on roads and on the ground

2013: North India floods — In June 2013, a multi-day cloudburst in Uttarakhand caused devastating floods and landslips. According to the State government, more than 5,700 people were presumed dead in the disaster. As bridges and roads were destroyed, more than 3 lakh people were trapped in the Valleys leading to the Char Dham pilgrimage sites

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. An India-EU trade pact may still remain elusive

The article throws light upon how COVID-19, Brexit and international tensions have unsettled the [European Union](#) and exacerbated its internal discords.

Challenges facing the European Union:

- Before COVID-19 and Brexit, the EU had the same GDP as the United States and was one of India's major trade and investment partners.
- Being the largest democracies and unions of linguistically, culturally and ethnically diverse States, both the EU and India are well suited for a special relationship.
- The reality is that the current status lacks mutual chemistry.
- Also, the EU now finds itself in an unusually turbulent situation.
 - The crises of 2020 made the structural lack of unity in the EU apparent.
 - Despite its desire for greater integration, it faces obstacles from adherence to the rule of law to a strategy for dealing with China, Russia, Turkey and Iran.

- After months of tortuous negotiation over Hungary and Poland's objections, member States finally agreed on a long-term budget and a COVID-19 recovery package of \$2 trillion.
 - The two countries had opposed anti-COVID-19 support being linked to good governance, in particular, to accusations of suppression of human rights and lack of independence in the judiciary.
- The Trump presidency forced Europe to reassess its relationship with America.
 - This stimulated the EU's drive for greater self-reliance in security, economics, supply chains and climate change, and an attempt to emerge as a major global pillar alongside the United States and China.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced divisive vaccine nationalism into the Union.

Shadow of Euroscepticism:

- Euroscepticism is criticism of the European Union and European integration. It is the opposition to increasing the powers of the European Union.
- The EU's attempt to condition its budget on the rule of law during the pandemic and recession only sharpened the emphasis on the veto power to which every member state is entitled.
- It was not only Britain that spawned a populist movement agitating to leave the EU. Europe's many Eurosceptic parties now focus on preventing closer unity.
- Elections are due in many EU states, including Germany and the Netherlands, both of which have strong Eurosceptic movements.

India-EU trade pact:

- India plans to start negotiations on investment and trade agreements with the European Union (EU).
- These are likely to run into the same problems as the discussions that began on a comprehensive free trade agreement in 2007. It was aborted due to differences on:
 - Movement of professionals, labour, human rights and environmental issues.
 - India's high tariffs, inconsistent tax regime and non-payment of arbitral awards.

Conclusion:

For the EU to resolve these innumerable and diverse problems without further widening existing ruptures will require enormous political will and polished skill. Trade agreements with India will be the least of its problems.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. The cost of Internet shutdowns

Context:

Farmer protests calling for the withdrawal of farm laws introduced by the government has become a part of our national and international discourse. Also, plenty of concerns have been raised on the manner in which the Centre introduced the Bills and its actions towards countering the movement have raised plenty of concerns.

Details:

- A principal concern among these has been the recurrent shutdowns of Internet services around many border areas of NCR ordered by the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- For India, unfortunately, internet blockages are not new.
- India shuts down Internet services more than any other democracy in the world.
 - The past four years have seen over 400 such shutdowns.
- Jammu and Kashmir saw the longest Internet shutdown across the world since the abrogation of [Article 370](#) in the erstwhile State.
 - Digital services were partially restored after a long period of 223 days.

Concerns:

- Many, including UN rights groups, termed the internet shutdowns as
 - a form of collective punishment for people.
 - an overreach of governments on citizens' rights and liberties.
- Currently, Indian laws have vague provisions for suspending telecommunication services, including the Internet, during times of public emergencies, or, if required, for protecting the public interest.

Impact of Internet shutdown:**Impact during the pandemic:**

- The impact of shutdowns becomes even more pronounced during a pandemic.
 - During the COVID-19 outbreak, the ones with good connectivity and know-how of digital tools were able to carry on with their lives with relatively fewer disruptions.
 - The ones without digital literacy or connectivity found themselves completely left out of all social and economic systems.
- Blanket bans on digital connectivity during the COVID-19 crisis may breed deep-rooted societal difficulties.
 - The most vulnerable among us may be cut off from health and welfare alerts.

- There could be breaks in vital digital services, including those currently being used by hospitals to monitor the well-being of their patients at risk of infection, including the elderly, and pregnant women.
- Students may lose access to avenues of learning as classes shift online.
- Journalists may find it impossible to do ground-reporting from already volatile areas.

Massive Losses:

- Internet shutdowns will freeze economic activity in affected areas and cause large-scale disruptions in economic output.
- Today, almost all white-collar employment sectors are encouraging their employees to work from home.
- India is estimated to have lost over ₹20,000 crore in 2020 because of Internet shutdowns.

Supreme Court ruling:

- In 2020, the Supreme Court had declared that the right to access the Internet is one of our [fundamental rights](#), alongside the freedom to carry on any trade, business or occupation over the medium of the Internet, under Article 19 of the Constitution.

Conclusion and Way Forward:

- Despite the costs and inconveniences involved, the shutdowns, on very rare occasions, do become necessary evils. However, it is hard to classify the ones initiated by the Central government in recent years under those categories.
- As the pace of globalisation, digitisation and connectivity accelerate, balancing civil liberties with security concerns will become an increasingly difficult task.
- Governments must find a way other than digital curbs to balance civil liberties and security.
- Internet bans should be a last resort and must be enforced following well-formulated protocols.
- Emergency response and relief systems for the vulnerable have to then work in parallel.
- Upgrading cyber divisions of law enforcement agencies with new-age innovations may offer several alternatives.
 - The use of some of these technologies, including mass surveillance systems and communication interceptors, also presents its own ethical dilemmas.
- Governments, especially in democracies, will have to create modern, independent institutions that have the authority and expertise to create frameworks that meet these challenges, without falling back on measures that result in state overreach.

Category: ECONOMY

1. Staying watchful

Context:

- The RBI's [Monetary Policy Committee \(MPC\)](#) has yet again left benchmark interest rates unchanged.
- It has reiterated that it will continue with its accommodative stance in order to secure a sustained economic recovery.

This topic has been covered in [6th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Details:

- The MPC has reasoned that while there are promising signs, the ongoing recovery is yet to gather firm traction making it crucial to provide continued policy support for restoring growth.
- The sharp deceleration in retail inflation in December 2020, when headline CPI inflation eased to 4.6% after being stuck above the RBI's upper tolerance threshold of 6% for six straight months, proved to be a relief for the MPC.
- The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme as well as the [Union Budget's](#) proposals to give a boost to infrastructure, and innovation and research, among other things, have been recognised as factors likely to restore confidence and lend a fillip to the growth momentum, respectively.
- Rural demand's persistent resilience is what the MPC sees supporting the demand recovery.
- However, while overall Rabi sowing has been 2.9% higher year-on-year, the farmers' agitation is a cause for concern as it has the potential to disrupt farm output threatening both growth and inflation dynamics.

Measures taken:

- RBI has sought to privilege its role as the government's debt manager through a clutch of regulatory announcements accompanying the latest monetary policy.
- The two main measures involve:
 - Extending the enhanced 'held-to-maturity' dispensation for banks buying debt issued by the Centre and States by a year up to March 31, 2023.
 - Allowing retail investors to make direct online purchases of government securities via a 'Retail Direct' gilt securities account held with the RBI.

Way forward:

- Interest rates are being held at near-record lows, inflation is still above the RBI's benchmark repo rate of 4% - resulting in negative real returns for savers. At this point, RBI cannot afford to drop its guard on vigilance over prices.

- With the Centre alone targeting to borrow as much as ₹12-lakh crore at the gross level in FY-22, the debt manager faces the unenviable task of ensuring two things:
 - The flood of debt finds takers at a price that does not push up borrowing costs for the rest of the real economy.
 - Trying and preventing the debt from crowding out demand for private investment credit.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Arab world's first probe nears Mars

What's in News?

The first Arab interplanetary mission is expected to reach Mars' orbit soon.

- This is considered the most critical part of the journey to unravel the secrets of weather on the red planet.
- As a part of the United Arab Emirates' ambitious space programme, the unmanned space probe named "Al-Amal" blasted off from Japan in 2020.

This topic has been covered in [21st July 2020 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Note:

The UAE has plans to launch an unmanned rover to the moon by 2024 and is also eyeing future mining projects beyond Earth, as well as space tourism.

G. Tidbits

1. Men access mental health helpline more

What's in News?

According to an internal report of Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry, men accessed the mental health helpline more.

Kiran:

- The 'Kiran' service – the mental health rehabilitation helpline was set up by the Social Justice and Empowerment Ministry.
- The helpline of the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) of the Ministry was launched in September 2020.
- The 24/7 helpline offers early screening, psychological first-aid, psychological support, distress management, mental well-being, psychological crisis management services and referrals to mental health experts.
- It is operated by 81 front-line professionals, apart from volunteer psychiatrists, clinical and rehabilitation psychologists.

Details:

- 70% of the callers were men and about 32% of those who reached out were students.
- Students were facing anxiety and depression due to the uncertainty about their future and lack of interaction with peers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Ukraine looking at defence purchases from India

What's in News?

Ukraine is looking to procure some military hardware from India in addition to efforts to deepen its presence in the Indian defence market.

- The two sides will discuss a range of proposals to take forward bilateral cooperation at the Bilateral Working Group meeting between the two Defence Ministries in April 2021.

Note:

- Ukraine has signed four agreements worth \$70 million which includes sale of new weapons as well as maintenance and upgrades of existing ones in service with the Indian armed forces.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Only the United States, India, the former Soviet Union, and the European Space Agency have successfully sent missions to orbit Mars.
2. Al-Amal is the first Arab space mission to Mars.

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:

Both statements are correct.

- Only the United States, India, the former Soviet Union, and the European Space Agency have successfully sent missions to orbit Mars – the fourth planet from the sun.
- Al-Amal, which mean “Hope” is the first Arab space mission to Mars.
- It is an unmanned probe to Mars.

Q2. Consider the following statements about K2 mountain:

1. It is the highest peak in the Karakoram.
2. It is the world's second-highest mountain.
3. It is known as ‘five treasures of snow’.

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- K2 Mountain is the highest peak in the Karakoram.
- It is the world's second-highest mountain after Mount Everest.

- Kangchenjunga is known as ‘five treasures of snow’.

Q3. Which of the following does the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) deal with?

1. Strategic Disinvestment
2. Asset Monetisation
3. Capital Restructuring
4. Sale of Central Government equity through offer for sale or private placement

Choose the correct option:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) deals with all matters relating to the management of Central Government investments in equity including disinvestment of equity in Central Public Sector Undertakings.
- The four major areas of its work relate to Strategic Disinvestment, Minority Stake Sales, Asset Monetisation and Capital Restructuring.
- It also deals with all matters relating to sale of Central Government equity through offer for sale or private placement or any other mode in the erstwhile Central Public Sector Undertakings.
- DIPAM works as one of the Departments under the Ministry of Finance.

Q4. The National Crisis Management Committee is chaired by:

- a. Prime Minister
- b. Cabinet Secretary
- c. Home Minister
- d. None of the above

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The National Crisis Management Committee is a committee set up by the Government of India in the wake of a natural calamity for effective coordination and implementation of relief measures and operations.
- It deals with major crises which have serious or national ramifications.
- It is chaired by Cabinet Secretary.
- Its functions are to oversee the Command, Control and Coordination of the disaster response; giving direction to the Crisis Management Group (CMG).

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the midst of an Internet revolution and the world entering an era of enhanced digital connectivity, should the governments find a way other than digital curbs to secure national security and law and order situation? Examine. (GS 2 Polity and Governance) (15 Marks 250 Words).
2. What do you understand by Euroscepticism? Discuss the major challenges facing the European Union in the backdrop of Brexit and COVID-19 pandemic. (GS 2 International Relations) (10 Marks, 150 Words)