

02 Mar 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

B. GS 2 Related

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [U.S. to keep hard line on China trade](#)
2. [Suu Kyi hit with two new criminal charges](#)

C. GS 3 Related

SECURITY

1. [Chinese may have targeted power systems, ports, says U.S. firm](#)
2. [Chinese cyber-attack foiled: Power Ministry](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [The vital but delicate task of reviving the Iran deal](#)

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [Master and the roster](#)

F. Prelims Facts

G. Tidbits

1. [‘Factory activity extends growth, input costs soar’](#)
2. [IIT-Delhi researchers develop technology to recycle e-waste](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

A. GS 1 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [U.S. to keep hard line on China trade](#)

Context:

2021 President's Trade Agenda and 2020 Annual Report were submitted by the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) to Congress.

Details:

- According to the report, the Biden administration's trade agenda will make pandemic recovery a top priority and focus on the American workers.
- The administration will:
 - Push for labour standards in its trade agreements.
 - Negotiate environmental standards.
 - Address China's coercive and unfair trade practices.
- The new administration is also likely to follow an aggressive agricultural trade policy.

Take on China:

- The ongoing comprehensive review of U.S. trade policy towards China is integral to the development of the Administration's overall China strategy.
- It committed to using all tools available to counter practices it calls unfair and harmful to the U.S.
- It will also collaborate with allies to address the market distortions created by the industrial overcapacity issue.
- Addressing human rights abuses against the Uighurs and others will be a top priority for the administration, as per the report.

Reforms at WTO:

- It will work with allies to implement necessary reforms to the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) substantive rules and procedures to address the challenges facing the global trading system, including growing inequality, digital transformation, and impediments to small business trade.

Issues from 'Make in India' policy:

- The report states that the country tried to resolve long-standing market access impediments affecting U.S. exporters during 2020 with India.
- Also, it called India's policies trade-restrictive.
- It stated that the Indian emphasis on import substitution through "Make in India" epitomises the challenges to the trade relationship.

2. Suu Kyi hit with two new criminal charges**Context:**

Ousted Myanmar civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi was hit with two new criminal charges in a court appearance, a month after a military coup triggered mass protests.

Background:

- Suu Kyi was already facing obscure criminal charges for possessing unlicensed walkie-talkies, as well as violating coronavirus restrictions by staging a campaign event during the 2020 election.
- She is now also accused of breaching communications laws as well as intent to incite public unrest.

This topic has been covered in the **5th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis**. Also, read about the global response to this development, covered in **13th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: SECURITY

1. Chinese may have targeted power systems, ports, says U.S. firm

Context:

U.S. cybersecurity and intelligence firm, Recorded Future has discovered and revealed cyber-intrusion in India by Chinese state-sponsored actors.

- Chinese state-sponsored actors may have deployed malware into Indian power grids and seaports as border tensions between India and China began escalating.
- As per the report, an October 12 grid failure in Mumbai may have been caused by the Chinese malware.
 - It links the malware attacks to a massive power outage in Mumbai and its suburbs which impacted hospitals, businesses, the stock market, homes and transport systems.
- The Indian government was alerted that there is evidence that some of the intrusions remain ongoing.
- The U.S firm has shared technical details of the intrusions with the Indian government that would allow them to identify and respond to the incidents.

India's Response:

- The Power Ministry confirmed that while attempts to breach systems were made, the sector had not been impacted.

2. Chinese cyber-attack foiled: Power Ministry

Context:

The Union Power Ministry said that the State-sponsored Chinese hacker groups targeted various Indian power centres.

Details:

- It was stated that the Chinese state-sponsored threat actor group known as Red Echo is targeting the Indian Power sector's Regional Load Dispatch Centres (RLDCs) along with State Load Dispatch Centres (SLDCs).
- These groups have been blocked after government cyber agencies warned them about their activities.

- It also confirmed that no data breach/data loss has been detected due to these incidents.
- Officials said they had been warned by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology's (MeitY's) Cyber Emergency Response Team (India) (CERT-in) about the threat from a malware called "ShadowPad" in November 2020, and by the NTRO's National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) in February 2021, of the threats, weeks before the Recorded Future report was released.

Note:

- The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) is an office within the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology.
- It is the nodal agency to deal with cybersecurity threats like hacking and phishing.
- It strengthens the security-related defence of the Indian Internet domain.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The vital but delicate task of reviving the Iran deal

Context:

- U.S. President Joe Biden administration's Iran policy.

Background:

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action:

- The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA, or the Iran nuclear deal) was the result of negotiations from 2013 and 2015 **between Iran and P5+1** (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union, or the EU).
- The deal was hailed as a diplomatic success given that Iran was then estimated to be months away from accumulating enough highly enriched uranium to produce one nuclear device.
- The JCPOA **obliged Iran to accept constraints on its enrichment programme in return for a partial lifting of economic sanctions**. The Iranian nuclear programme would be verified by an **inspection regime under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)**.

U.S. policy reversal:

- The U.S. administration under Mr. Trump pulled out of the deal in May 2018 and embarked on a **policy of 'maximum pressure'** to coerce Iran back to the negotiating table.
- The U.S. pushed ahead with its sanctions, widening their scope to cover nearly all Iranian banks, industries and even important individuals.

E-3 stance:

- The U.S. decision was criticised by all other parties to the JCPOA (including the European allies) because Iran was in compliance with its obligations under the nuclear deal.
- The **E-3 (France, Germany, the U.K.) and the EU promised to find ways to mitigate the U.S. decision.**

Policy under new U.S. administration:

- Biden has consistently advocated a return to the JCPOA provided Iran returns to full compliance.
- Joe Biden has been a strident critic of the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear agreement with Iran. He had promised during his presidential election campaign that subject to Iran's compliance with its obligations, the U.S. would re-enter the agreement.

Concerns:

- The Nuclear deal is complicated and time is running out as both Iran and the U.S. struggle to overcome the current impasse.

Tehran's strategy of 'maximum resistance':

- Tehran's 'strategic patience' has been wearing out as the anticipated economic relief from the E-3/EU failed to materialise. As the U.S. sanctions began to hurt, **Tehran shifted to a strategy of 'maximum resistance'.**
- Iran has been moving away from JCPOA's constraints incrementally by expanding its nuclear capabilities.
 - A recent IAEA report has confirmed that **20% enrichment had begun** as had production of uranium metal at Isfahan.
- Following the drone strike on Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Gen. Qasem Soleiman, Tehran announced that it would no longer observe the JCPOA's restraints, though its cooperation with the IAEA would continue.

Failed promises of relief:

- The E-3's promised relief **Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX)**, created in 2019 to facilitate limited trade with Iran has been a disappointment.
- The first transaction under INSTEX took place only in March 2020.
- EU-Iran trade fell from €18 billion in 2018 to less than a third in 2019 and dropped further last year.

Events in Iran:

- **COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on the Iranian economy** which was already contracting due to the U.S. sanctions.
- Iran has also been witness to a series of unexplained fires and blasts at a number of sensitive sites including one at the Natanz nuclear facility and another at Khojir, a missile fuel fabrication unit. Recently, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, a senior nuclear scientist and head of the Research and Innovation Organisation in the Iranian Defence Ministry was killed outside Tehran amid rumours of external intelligence agencies' involvement. The above events have **hardened the stance of the conservatives in Iran.**

- Iranian Parliament, dominated by the conservatives, passed a bill seeking enrichment to be raised to 20% and suspending implementation of some of the special inspection provisions with the IAEA within two months if sanctions relief was not forthcoming.
- There seems to be **little appetite for more negotiations in Iran**. Mr. Trump's policy failed to bring Iran back to the negotiating table and only strengthened the hardliners in Iran.

Elections in Iran:

- Iranian elections are due in June 2021 and it is likely that President Hassan Rouhani's successor may not be from the 'moderate' camp. This would only make negotiations tougher.

Threat of breakdown in talks:

- If the U.S. waits for Iran to return to full compliance before lifting sanctions or Iran waits for the U.S. to restore sanctions relief before returning to full compliance, it can only lead to one outcome — the **collapse of the JCPOA with Iran going nuclear like North Korea**. Such an outcome would have major reverberations in the region and beyond.

Way forward:

Creating a conducive atmosphere for talks:

- Positive steps along multiple tracks are necessary for creating a conducive atmosphere.
 - Iran should consider releasing European and American nationals currently in custody in Iran.
 - The U.S. should **support Iran's applications to the International Monetary Fund for COVID-19 relief and for supply of vaccines under the international COVAX facility**.
 - The U.S. could consider removing sanctions on Iranian political leaders.

Role of regional nations:

- **Oman, Qatar and Kuwait need to play a diplomatic role** in facilitating talks between the U.S. and Iran, with help from the EU and the UN.

E-3/EU's role:

- The E-3/EU need to fast track deals worth several hundred million euros stuck in the INSTEX pipeline.
- The **EU should pursue a more independent foreign policy in this issue by taking the lead in future negotiations**.

Iran's actions:

- Iran needs to **refrain from any further nuclear brinkmanship**. The IAEA and the E-3/EU should work on a parallel reversal of steps taken by Iran to ensure full compliance with the JCPOA.

For related information on this issue refer to:

UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis for 12th Feb 2021.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Master and the roster

Context:

- The Supreme Court **proceedings in the case of the alleged conspiracy to threaten the independence of the judiciary** on the basis of sexual harassment allegations against the former Chief Justice of India (CJI), Ranjan Gogoi.
- The proceedings into the case have ended and the proceedings have remained inconclusive.

Details:

Master of the Roster system:

- The article laments that the SC proceedings failed to recognise the threat to judicial independence posed by the singular power of the CJI as the Master of the Roster.
 - The Master of the Roster system **vests exclusive discretion in the Chief Justice to constitute benches and allocate cases.**
- The Master of the Roster power enjoyed by the CJI lay at the heart of the controversy surrounding the proceedings the Court has now closed.
 - The Master of the Roster power enjoyed by Justice Gogoi allowed him to institute suo motu proceedings despite being an accused and even presided over it. The case was labelled as a matter of judicial independence.

Concerns:

Threat of becoming a singular power:

- The Master of the Roster power makes the CJI's office a high stakes one placing all the powers in the hands of the CJI and making the **CJI the sole point of defence of the Court against executive interference.**
- With the CJI as the sole Master of the Roster, any executive seeking to influence the Supreme Court needs only a pliant CJI. A pliant Master of the Roster carries the danger of producing a pliant Court. Hence, this system **threatens the principle of judicial independence.**

Lack of scrutiny:

- The CJI's Master of the Roster power is enjoyed without scrutiny.
- **A group of senior judges of the SC have previously levelled allegations of favouritism in how CJI Dipak Misra allocated cases,** through a press conference.

Reluctance of the higher judiciary to reform:

- The Supreme Court has been reluctant to dilute the Master of the Roster power.
 - In **Asok Pande v. Supreme Court of India (2018)**, a three-judge bench of the Court held that Master of the Roster is the CJI's exclusive power.
 - The two-judge bench in **Shanti Bhushan v. Supreme Court of India (2018)** rejected the plea that the Master of the Roster should be interpreted as the collegium.

Challenges in judiciary:

- The existing system despite the progressive reform like the institution of the collegium system in the appointment process has **failed to prevent executive interferences in the judiciary** due to the following two reasons.
 - Lure of **post-retirement jobs**
 - The CJI's allocation of cases remains an unchecked power owing to the Master of the Roster powers enjoyed by CJI.

Way forward:

- Future judicial reforms should address the above two issues in the following ways.
 - A **cooling-off period between retirement and a post-retirement appointment** needs to be introduced.
 - The power of Master of the Roster needs to be diversified beyond the CJI's exclusive discretion. Rather it could involve a **system similar to the collegium system** associated with the appointment process.

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. 'Factory activity extends growth, input costs soar'

What's in News?

India's factory activity expanded for the seventh straight month in February 2021.

- According to a private-sector survey, the expansion is driven by strong demand and increased output.
- The Nikkei Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index, compiled by IHS Markit was well above the 50-level separating growth from contraction.
- Sub-indexes showed output and new orders rose sharply in February, indicating strong demand.

Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI):

- The Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) is an index of the prevailing direction of economic trends in the manufacturing sector, compiled by IHS Markit.
- It consists of a diffusion index that summarizes whether market conditions, as viewed by purchasing managers, are expanding, staying the same, or contracting.
- The headline PMI is a number from 0 to 100.
 - A PMI above 50 represents an expansion when compared with the previous month.
 - A PMI reading under 50 represents a contraction, and a reading at 50 indicates no change.

2. IIT-Delhi researchers develop technology to recycle e-waste

What's in News?

The researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi have developed a zero-emission technology to manage and recycle e-waste to wealth.

- The team adopted a methodology that uses e-waste as an “Urban Mine” for metal recovery and energy production.
 - The e-waste is shredded and pyrolyzed to yield liquid and gaseous fuels, leaving behind a metal-rich solid fraction.
 - On further separation using a novel technique, the leftover solid residue yields a 90-95% pure metal mixture and some carbonaceous materials.
 - The carbonaceous material is further converted to aerogel for oil spillage cleaning, dye removal, carbon dioxide capture, and use in supercapacitors.
- The technology is an outcome of a Department of Science and Technology-funded project and developed technology.
- The project will cater to the need of “Smart Cities,” “[Swachh Bharat Abhiyan](#),” and “Atmanirbhar Bharat” initiatives of the government.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to the Aravalli Hills:

1. It is a fold mountain.
2. The mountain range spans across Gujarat, Haryana, Delhi and Rajasthan.
3. Dhosi Hill, an extinct volcano, is a part of the Aravalli range.

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: d

Explanation:

- The Aravalli Range, an eroded stub of ancient mountains, is the oldest range of fold mountains.
- The mountain range spans across Gujarat, Haryana, Delhi and Rajasthan.
- Dhosi Hill, an extinct volcano, is a part of the Aravalli range.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha

Abhiyan (RUSA):

1. It is a central sector scheme.
2. It aims to provide strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- It is a centrally sponsored scheme launched in 2013.
- It aims to provide strategic funding to eligible state higher educational institutions.
- The central funding (in the ratio of 60:40 for general category states, 90:10 for special category states and 100% for union territories) is based on norms and is outcome dependent.
- Funds flow from the central ministry through the state governments/union territories to the State Higher Education Councils before reaching the identified institutions.
- It is a scheme under the Ministry of Education (formerly HRD).

Q3. Consider the following statements with respect to Janaushadhi centres:

1. These centres are run by the Indian Medical Association (IMA).
2. At these centres, generic medicines are sold at 50% to 90% lesser prices as compared to the market prices of branded medicines.
3. The centres are run as a part of Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP).

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Janaushadhi centres are run as part of the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP).

- These centres are run by the Bureau of Pharma PSUs in India (BPPI).
- In these centres, generic medicines are sold at 50% to 90% lesser prices as compared to the market prices of branded medicines.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to the strait of Hormuz:

1. It separates Iran from the Arabian Peninsula.
2. It links the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman.
3. It provides the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Strait of Hormuz is a strait between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.
- It separates Iran from the Arabian Peninsula.
- It provides the only sea passage from the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The Iran Nuclear deal is complicated and time is running out as both Iran and the U.S. struggle to overcome the current impasse. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words) [GS-2, International Relations]
2. What is meant by the Master of the Roster system in the Judiciary? Analyze the arguments both in favour of and against this system. (10 marks, 150 words) [GS-2, Polity]