

13 Mar 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Quad leaders for 'open, free' Indo-Pacific

Context:

- Quad's (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) first-ever leadership summit.
- The virtual summit was attended by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, President Joe Biden of the United States, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

Key highlights of the Summit:

- Addressing the virtual summit, the QUAD leaders highlighted cooperation among the member countries to beat the global pandemic, with a joint partnership on vaccines.
- During the discussion, there was a wholesome appreciation of the **Vaccine Maitri initiative**.
 - The Quad members agreed to ensure equitable access to vaccines. The U.S., Japan and Australia will finance the vaccine initiative.
- The need for an open and free Indo-Pacific region was emphasised.
- It was highlighted that the Indo-Pacific region should be governed in accordance with human rights.
- The vaccine expert working group, a critical and emerging technology working group, and a climate working group for technology, capacity building and climate finance were cleared during the summit.

Note:

- In the backdrop of Quad's leadership summit, China has said cooperation between nations should not target or damage the interests of a third party and countries should not pursue exclusive blocs.
- The meet is being closely followed in China which has broadly framed it as a U.S.-led effort aimed at containing China.

2. Russia for Taliban's inclusion in Afghan interim govt.

Context:

Russia has said that it backs the Taliban's integration into a future interim government in Afghanistan.

Details:

- The Foreign Ministry's comments come as global powers have ramped up efforts to secure a peace deal and end decades of war.

Afghan Peace Talks:

- The US has encouraged the Afghan leadership to work towards establishing an inclusive government and proposed talks with the Taliban to secure a peace accord.
 - U.S. President Joe Biden is reviewing whether to stick to a deal with the Taliban negotiated by his predecessor Donald Trump, who wanted to pull out the U.S. troops from Afghanistan by May 2021.

This topic has been covered in the **10th March 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

Concerns:

- The U.S. withdrawal is being complicated by a new surge in fighting and concern that a speedy exit may only unleash further chaos.
- The US fears that the security situation will worsen and the Taliban could make rapid territorial gains if the U.S. suddenly withdrew.

3. Stop influx from Myanmar: Centre

Context:

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has written to the Chief Secretaries of Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh to take appropriate action as per law to check illegal influx from Myanmar into India.

Background:

- India and Myanmar share a 1,643-km border and people on either side have familial ties.
- People including policemen and women from Myanmar have fled to Mizoram fearing a military crackdown.

Details:

- The MHA directive comes as the military coup and subsequent crackdown in Myanmar has led to several persons crossing over into India.
- MHA said that the State governments had no powers to grant refugee status to any foreigner.
- It also reiterated that India is not a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention of 1951 and its 1967 Protocol.
- MHA has also issued an advisory to Chief Secretaries of Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh and also to the Border Guarding Force (BGF) along the India-Myanmar border to stay alert and take appropriate action to prevent a possible influx into Indian territory.
- Guidelines have been sent to states to sensitize the law enforcement and intelligence agencies for taking appropriate prompt steps for identifying illegal migrants, their restrictions to specific locations as per provisions of law, capturing their biographic and biometric particulars, cancellation of fake Indian documents and legal proceedings including initiation of deportation proceedings as per provisions of law.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Bureaucrats cannot be State Election Commissioners: SC

Context:

The Supreme Court has held that independent persons and not bureaucrats should be appointed State Election Commissioners.

Details:

- The SC directed that the States should appoint independent persons as Election Commissioners all along the length and breadth of the country, stating that the independence of Election Commissions cannot be compromised.
- It stated that giving government employees the additional charge of State Election Commissioners is a mockery of the Constitution.
- Asserting that its directions be followed strictly, it called for the government employees holding the post of State Election Commissioners as an additional charge to give up the post.

State Election Commission:

- The State Election Commission (SEC) is vested with the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of all elections to the Panchayats and the Municipalities.
- The State Election Commissioner is appointed by the [Governor](#).
- However, the State Election Commissioners can only be removed by impeachment.
- State governments should abide by orders of the SECs during the conduct of the panchayat and municipal elections, just like they follow the instructions of the Election Commission (EC) during Assembly and Parliament polls.
- In other words, the SECs enjoy the same status as the EC.

2. Rajasthan Information Commission penalises five officials for negligence

Context:

The Rajasthan State Information Commission has imposed fines on government officials showing negligence in providing information under the Right to Information (RTI) Act.

Details:

- The Commission has laid emphasis on the display of information by the departments and local bodies on their own.
- The weekly review of work by the Chief Information Commissioner and penalisation orders have made an impact, ensuring compliance with the RTI Act.

State Information Commission:

- The State Information Commission (SIC) is a quasi-judicial body.
- Right to Information Act provides provisions for the creation of State Information Commission.

To know more about the structure of SIC, members, the procedure for appointments, powers and functions, read the [State Information Commission](#).

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. 'Centre to infuse ₹14,500 cr. into banks under PCA soon'

Context:

The Finance Ministry is likely to decide on the infusion of ₹14,500 crore mainly in banks that are under the RBI's prompt corrective action (PCA) framework, to improve their financial health.

Details:

- For the current financial year, the government had allocated ₹20,000 crore for capital infusion into PSBs to help them meet their regulatory requirements.
- The capital infusion will help these banks to come out of the RBI's enhanced regulatory supervision.
- Indian Overseas Bank, Central Bank of India and UCO Bank are currently under the PCA framework.
- PCA framework places several curbs, including on lending and management compensation.

Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework:

- Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) is a framework in which banks with weak financial records are placed under the supervision of the Reserve Bank of India.
- The Prompt Corrective Action framework deems banks as risky if they slip some trigger points – capital to risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR), net NPA, Return on Assets (RoA) and Tier 1 Leverage ratio.

Read more on **Prompt Corrective Action (PCA)**.

Note:

Most large state-owned lenders like State Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, Bank of Baroda, Canara Bank, Union Bank of India and Indian Bank have already raised money from market sources, including share sale on a private placement basis.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Two bad options

The editorial talks about the two bad options that Afghanistan is presented with, where Afghanistan's leaders have to choose between war and sharing power with the Taliban.

Details:

- The global powers have ramped up efforts to secure a peace deal and end decades of war in Afghanistan.
- US President Joe Biden is pushing for an interim unity government in Afghanistan.
 - This indicates his desire to replace Mr. Ghani's government with an interim one that would include the Taliban's nominees.

- Also, the U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has proposed a senior-level meeting between the Afghan government and the Taliban in Turkey and a multilateral conference of envoys from the U.S., Russia, China, Iran, India and Pakistan to discuss a lasting Afghan solution.

America's Afghan strategy:

- The peace push comes at a time when the Biden administration is reviewing the U.S.'s Afghan strategy.
- According to the February 2020 agreement signed between the Trump administration and the Taliban, the U.S. is scheduled to withdraw its troops by May 1, 2021.
- The Taliban have warned they would step up fighting targeting the coalition troops should the U.S. fail to pull out by then.
- The Biden administration is under pressure. The U.S. wants to get out of the longest war in its history. But the U.S. worries that if its troops are out without a peace mechanism, the Taliban, which already controls much of the country's hinterlands, could make rapid territorial gains.
- The U.S. seeks to stop this from happening by proposing an interim inclusive government between the warring parties.

Faults in Donald Trump's Strategy:

- Under Mr. Trump, the U.S. held direct talks with the Taliban excluding the Afghan government.
- After reaching a deal, the U.S. put pressure on the Afghan government to release prisoners, but failed to get any concessions from the insurgents on reducing violence.
- Even when Afghan government representatives and the Taliban were holding talks in Doha, Qatar, Afghanistan continued to witness violence.

Way Forward:

- Both sides (the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban) should hold talks on the future constitutional and governance framework.
- Regional powers, including India and Pakistan, could play a decisive role in this transition as part of a UN-mandated multiparty peace process. This is a more inclusive approach.
- The Biden administration does not seem to have faith in the Doha talks, which, even after months, failed to achieve any breakthrough.

Two bad options:

- After 20 years of war, the Afghan leadership does not have any good options to end the conflict.
- If the Biden administration decides to stick to the Taliban deal and pull back troops, there is no guarantee that the intra-Afghan talks would hold.
- The Taliban would rather try to take over the whole country using force.
- If the government accepts Mr. Biden's proposal, Afghanistan's elected leaders will have to share power with the Taliban and agree to amend the Constitution.
 - This means some of the country's hard-won liberties could be sacrificed.
- For Afghanistan, it is a choice between two bad options.

2. A moral test

Context:

With a year having passed after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic, UN Secretary-General António Guterres has criticised vaccine nationalism and hoarding in the world.

Issue:

- In spite of pressure by international organisations and efforts to pool resources in a way that all countries could at the earliest begin vaccinating at least a fraction of their most vulnerable population, several countries were unable to administer a single dose.
 - This was despite vaccines being stockpiled since November 2020.
- In Africa, only 13 countries have begun vaccinating. In contrast, over 10% of the U.S. population has been fully vaccinated, or got both doses, as has 3% of the EU.
- The percentages nearly double when accounting for their populations that have got at least one dose, reaching as high as 34% in the U.K.
- The U.S. contracted with many vaccine companies for several times the doses it needed. It was precisely this that had led to concerns of 'vaccine nationalism'.
- The pipeline of supply was largely dependent on India and China.
- The pharma companies are private entities bound by contracts to the highest bidders, and not necessarily the Indian government.

India's Vaccine Diplomacy:

- India is the third biggest vaccinator among countries.
- It has administered about 1.91 doses per 100 people.
- But it has fully vaccinated only 0.3% of its population.
- India has earned laurels for its vaccine diplomacy and Vaccine Maitri initiatives.

Shortcomings:

- Along with the global inequity in accessing vaccination, India is seeing a version of it play out since vaccinations began.
- There are several public health centres, villages and districts where no vaccines have been administered.
- India aims to inoculate at least 250 million with two doses from March-July — or over 3.3 million doses per day. But at best, India has administered 1.8 million doses per day.
- There is an apparent "class divide" with the rich and those better informed disproportionately getting vaccinated as compared to the poor.

Conclusion:

- While the reprieve is that more vaccines are in the pipeline, there will always be the concern that the poor, the old and the digitally naive will be left out.

- The UN and WHO must continue to exert pressure on the privileged nations to improve global availability as well as bear upon countries to improve equitable access within their territory too.

3. Casting the Asian dice on a West Asia board

The multi-nation exercise hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) named Desert Flag is scheduled from March 3rd to 27th, 2021.

Exercise Desert Flag:

- Other than India and the UAE, Bahrain, France, Saudi Arabia, South Korea and the United States are participating in the exercise.
- The exercise offers an interesting view for New Delhi of the various geopolitical intricacies at play in and around the West Asia region.

Current Situation in West Asia:

Complexities in West Asia:

- West Asia is home to some of the most complex security conundrums of modern times.
- The sixth edition of Desert Flag takes place in the backdrop of
 - Tensions between Iran and the U.S. at their peak.
 - The signing of the Abraham Accords between Israel, the UAE and Bahrain.
 - A more cordial and joint Arab-Israeli dynamic predominantly designed to counter Iran's growing influence in the region, as seen through the wars in Syria and Yemen.

Links with Asia:

- The 2021 edition's involvement of contingents from India and South Korea showcases the growing interests of Asian economies.
- As net importers of crude oil, the Asian economies rely heavily on the West Asian states for their supplies.
- By association, Asian economies have increased stakes in the safety and security of the region from the perspective of political and economic stability.
- Asian economies have interests in the protection of vital sea lanes in areas such as the Strait of Hormuz, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea stretching out into the Arabian Sea and the wider Indian Ocean.

A fading U.S. hold:

- In April 2020, Saudi Arabia was India's top supplier of oil followed by Iraq.
- For South Korea, in late 2019, it was also Saudi Arabia as the top supplier as both New Delhi and Seoul hedged their bets and diversified, with Russia and the U.S. entering as strong alternatives.
- January 2021 marked the first time since 1985 that the U.S. did not import oil from Saudi Arabia.
- The participation of both India and South Korea in these exercises in the Persian Gulf is reflective of these trends and growing concerns in Asian capitals over an eroding U.S. security blanket in the region.

Iran and tensions:

- Amidst these realities, both India and South Korea have found themselves caught in regional tensions as the pressure on Iran to restart the 2015 nuclear agreement (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) increases.
- Both India and South Korea have faced similar consequences over the past decade as the West first negotiated JCPOA with Iran, and later tried to manage the fallout of its collapse (when the US exited the deal).

India's involvement:

- India's security footprint in West Asia has seen a steady increase.
- Energy security and safe passage of sea routes are one of the main driving factors.
- The Indian Navy has made multiple port calls from the UAE and Kuwait to Iran and Qatar in recent years.
- In 2020, India had also planned its first bilateral naval exercise with Saudi Arabia, which was postponed due to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Conclusion:

- The current situation where Asian nations are having to band together to protect their energy interests in West Asia is not new.
 - Former Indian diplomats have even suggested an idea equitable to an 'importers OPEC', or Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, led by Asian states.
 - Asian countries have a much larger stake in West Asia's oil than the West.
- This trend of an increasing Asian security interest and footprint is expected to only magnify in the years to come.

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. Bring down benzene emission at fuel outlets, says panel

What's in News?

A joint committee appointed by the [National Green Tribunal \(NGT\)](#) to study air pollution in Kerala has recommended the installation of vapour recovery system at fuelling stations and retrofitting of diesel vehicles with particulate filters to improve air quality.

- The report pointed out that petrol refuelling stations were a major source of benzene emissions, volatile organic compounds, and particulate matter 2.5 concentrations.
- Therefore, it suggested that the installation of vapour recovery system is an important step in improving air quality.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements:

1. Bureaucrats are eligible to be appointed as the State Election Commissioners.
2. The State Election Commissioner is appointed by the Governor.
3. The courts cannot interfere in the conduct of polls to local bodies and self-government institutions once the electoral process has been set in motion.

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:

- The Supreme Court has directed that independent persons and not bureaucrats should be appointed State Election Commissioners.
- Courts cannot interfere in the conduct of polls to local bodies and self-government institutions once the electoral process has been set in motion.
- Constitution bars interference in poll matters set in motion by the SECs and EC.
- Only after the polls are over can the SECs' decisions or conduct be questioned through an election petition.
- The State Election Commissioner is appointed by the Governor.
- However, the State Election Commissioners can only be removed by impeachment.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework:

1. It is a framework under which banks with weak financial metrics are put under watch by the RBI.
2. The PCA framework deems banks as risky if they slip trigger points based on the three parameters of capital ratios, asset quality and profitability.
3. The PCA framework is applicable to commercial banks, co-operative banks as well as non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).

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

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) framework is a framework under which banks with weak financial metrics are put under watch by the RBI.
- The Reserve Bank has specified certain regulatory trigger points, as a part of prompt corrective action (PCA) framework, in terms of three parameters, i.e. capital to risk weighted assets ratio (CRAR), net non-performing assets (NPA) and Return on Assets (RoA), for initiation of certain structured and discretionary actions in respect of banks hitting such trigger points.
- The PCA framework is applicable only to commercial banks and not extended to co-operative banks, non-banking financial companies (NBFCs).

Q3. Exercise "Desert Flag" is hosted by:

- a. Saudi Arabia
- b. United Arab Emirates (UAE)
- c. Bahrain
- d. Oman

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Desert flag is a multinational exercise hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- It is an annual multi-national large force employment warfare exercise.

Q4. Consider the following statements with respect to Ayya Vaikunda Swamikal:

1. He is the founder of 'Samathwa Samajam'.
2. He founded the Self Respect Movement and invited Periyar to lead the movement.
3. He led an agitation known as the Mel Mundu Samaram.

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

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Ayya Vaikunda Swamikal (1809-1851) was a great thinker and social reformer of the 19th century.
- Being the founder of 'Samathwa Samajam', an early socio-reform movement in India (1836), Ayya Vaikundar is considered as the pioneer of such revolutionary movements in India.
- He was the first to install a mirror for worshipping in South India.
- He was the exponent of a new path of spiritual thoughts named 'Ayya Vazhi'.
- His said, 'One caste, One religion, One clan, One world, One God'.
- He led an agitation known as the Mel Mundu Samaram.
- The Self-Respect Movement was founded in 1921. It was not started by Ayya Vaikunda Swamikal.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. In the event of America's responsible withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan or otherwise, the Biden Administration's policy towards the Afghan Peace Talks indicates that the Taliban is set to make gains. Critically evaluate. (15 Marks, 250 Words)[GS-2, International Relations]
2. Making available vaccines equitably presents the greatest moral test of our times. It is the responsibility of privileged nations to improve global availability and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines. Elucidate (15 Marks, 250 Words) [GS-2, International Relations]