

23 Mar 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: GEOGRAPHY

1. U.P., M.P. sign agreement on Ken-Betwa interlinking work

Context:

The governments of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh have signed an agreement that nudges forward a long-stalled multi-crore, controversial project to link the Ken and the Betwa rivers.

Ken-Betwa interlinking Project:

- The project aims to irrigate the water-deficient Bundelkhand region, spread over both States, and provide electricity.
- The project involves transferring surplus water from the Ken river in Madhya Pradesh to the Betwa in Uttar Pradesh and irrigating 3.64 lakh hectares in the Bundelkhand region of both States.
- The project involves building a 77-metre-tall and a 2-km-wide Dhaudhan dam and a 230-km canal.
- The Centre was originally to fund 90% of the cost (₹37,611 crore in 2018) but a final decision is still outstanding.

Read more on the Ken-Betwa Interlinking Project [here](#).

Obstacles:

Several obstacles have dogged the project.

- Nearly 8,650 hectares of forest land including part of Panna National Park in Madhya Pradesh will be submerged if the project is to become a reality.
 - It will also have an adverse impact on tiger reserves and wildlife sanctuaries in the region. This has led to widespread opposition from conservationists.
 - It would also affect the habitat of vultures and jackals. After years of protests, however, it was finally cleared by the apex wildlife regulator, the National Board for Wildlife, in 2016.
- There have been disagreements between the two state governments. Eg: disagreement between the States on the share of water.
 - While there is a 2005 agreement between the two States on how water would be shared, Madhya Pradesh says these assumptions are no longer valid and the only way to meet the increased water requirements would be to include local management projects — the Kotha barrage, Lower Orr and Bina complex that were envisaged in the second phase of the project — in the first phase.
 - This would increase project costs.
- The project has been delayed due to political and environmental issues.

In the latest development, the agreement has been signed by both Chief Ministers.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Amid protests, LS passes GNCTD amendment Bill

Context:

The Lok Sabha passed a Bill that defines that the word government in Delhi means the Lieutenant-Governor (L-G) and makes it mandatory for the elected government in the national capital territory to take the opinion of the L-G before any executive action.

This topic has been covered in the [21st March 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. China, Russia look to deepen 'best' ties

Context:

Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is on a key visit to China.

Details:

- The visit comes shortly after the China-U.S. dialogue in Alaska. It follows the first leaders' summit of the [Quad](#) (India, Australia, Japan and the U.S.) grouping.
- He asserted that Russia's relations with China were currently at the best in their entire history.
- He argued that the formation of a truly multipolar and democratic world is, unfortunately, being hindered by Western countries, particularly the United States as they seek to continue to dominate at any cost on global economy and politics and impose their will and requirements on others.
- He said, "In response, Russia and China are promoting a constructive and unifying agenda and hope that the international governance system would be fair and democratic, run smoothly and be based on extensive interaction between countries and their integration initiatives,".

Areas of Discussion:

- Both countries are expected to discuss deepening coordination against the threat of sanctions from the West.
- Recently, the EU imposed sanctions on four Chinese officials for human rights violations in Xinjiang, the first sanctions since the 1989 arms embargo.
- Lavrov called on both countries (permanent members of the [UN Security Council](#)) to work under the UN framework on the immediate end to unilateral coercive measures and to take the opportunity to enhance their scientific and technological innovation and improve their national strength in response to the sanctions.
- Trade ties are also on the agenda.
 - China is Russia's biggest trade partner.

Note:

- 2021 marks the 20th anniversary of the Treaty of Good-neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation signed in July 2001.
- This treaty was credited by Russia for deepening strategic relations and creating a model of interaction between Russia and China that is absolutely free from any ideological constraints, not subject to any opportunistic factors nor against any third country.

Strategic Angle:

- Experts in Russia believe that the China-Russia relationship could counterbalance the Quad.
- Russia's continuing close relations with India is a potential destabilising factor for the Quad's potential.
- They believe that India would not destroy its relations with Russia just because it wants to seek courtship with the U.S. to deal with China. From this perspective, if Russia-India relations continue in a stable way, they will to some extent restrain India-US ties from further deepening.

Strategic Triangle:

- As early as December 1998, the then Russian Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov expressed hope that Russia, China and India could establish a 'strategic triangle' that would be in the interests of peace and security.
- Currently, China and India have undergone twists and turns in their relations due to border tensions.
- Russia has actually played an active role between China and India.
- Russia has maintained relatively close ties with India, which has thereupon become a counterbalance to the Quad group.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. 'Workers in govt. contracts must possess skill certificate'

Context:

The government has decided that all workers executing government contracts must have official certification for their skills.

Issue:

- Government contractors' preference for low-wage informal workers was creating a dichotomy where the government was trying to promote skilling in the workforce without insisting on the use of skilled manpower for its projects.
- The new stipulation would make more people seek certification and influence industry hiring practices, the Ministry said.

Details:

- The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has told all government departments to mandate this requirement for all contracts issued under their watch.

- The government aims to train and certify skilled workers, in contrast to contractors' preference to employ informal workers at lower wages.
- A phase-wise application is being thought about where it could be mandated that up to 10% of the strength of skilled workers utilised in 2021-22 will be certified skilled workers, which would be progressively increased to 100% by 2026-27.

Note:

- As per the Periodic Labour Force Survey of 2018-19, only 2.4% of India's workforce is formally trained.

2. Rajya Sabha passes MMDR Amendment

Context:

The Rajya Sabha passed the Mines and Mineral (Development and Regulation) [MMDR] Amendment Bill, 2021.

This topic has been covered in the **20th March 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.**

3. LS nod for Bill to increase FDI in insurance

Context:

The Lok Sabha passed the Insurance (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which seeks to raise the limit for Foreign Direct Investment (**FDI**) in insurance companies from 49% to 74%.

This topic has been covered in the **19th March 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.**

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Delhi's administration as the tail wagging the dog

Context:

- The **Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021.**

Background:

Governing Delhi:

- When the Constitution came into force, there were four kinds of States, called Parts A, B, C and D States, with the last two being administered by centrally appointed Chief Commissioners and Lieutenant Governors, with no locally elected Assemblies to aid and advise them. Delhi was initially made a Part C State.
- In 1951, a Legislative Assembly was created with an elected Chief Minister.

- In 1956, following the **States Reorganisation Act**, Delhi became a Union Territory to be administered by an Administrator appointed by the President. The Legislative Assembly of Delhi and the Council stood abolished.
- The Delhi Administration Act, 1966 provided for a limited representative government in Delhi through a Metropolitan Council comprising of predominantly elected members.
- In 1987, the **Balakrishnan Committee** was set up to recommend with regard to the status to be conferred on Delhi. In 1989, the Committee recommended that Delhi should continue to be a Union Territory but that there must be a Legislative Assembly and Council of Ministers responsible to the said Assembly with appropriate powers. Based on this report, the **Constitution (69th) Amendment Act and the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (GNCT) Act, 1991** were passed.
- Between 1991 to date, there have been various instances when the Delhi Assembly has been won by a party other than the ruling party at the Centre. As a result, the Delhi Government and the Union Government have differed on numerous issues. The ensuing fights lead to constitutional questions on Delhi's peculiar government structure being litigated up to the Supreme Court.

For related information on the stand taken by the judiciary refer to:

21st Mar 2021 UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis

Concerns:

- Despite the Central government's justification for the new bill to be able to address the ambiguities in the interpretation of the legislative provisions related to the governance of NCT, there are various concerns associated with the newly introduced bill.

Against the Judiciary's take on the issue:

- The SC bench which looked into the issue had noted that Parliament envisaged a representative form of Government for the NCT of Delhi by providing for New Delhi a directly elected Legislative Assembly which shall have legislative powers over matters falling within the State List and the Concurrent List, barring those excepted.
- The Lieutenant Governor will have to act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers except when he decides to refer the matter to the President for a final decision.
- The SC bench which looked into the issue had noted that the **Constitution mandated a federal balance** wherein independence of a certain required degree is assured to the State Governments. A balanced federal structure mandates that the Union does not usurp all powers and the States enjoy freedom without any unsolicited interference from the Central Government with respect to matters which exclusively fall within their domain.

Lack of representative democracy:

- The Government of NCT of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 effectively **reduces the elected government to a mere vestigial organ and elevates the standing of the centrally appointed LG**. The powers of the elected government in Delhi would be completely dependent on the LG.
- The population of Delhi will have an unrepresentative administration given the powers bestowed upon the appointed LG. The residents of Delhi will not be able to hold accountable an unelected, centrally appointed government functionary.

Against parliamentary form of democracy:

- The Indian constitutional framework has President and Governors, in whose name, the government is run. These nominal heads can do almost nothing by themselves, without the aid and advice of their cabinet of ministers. However, the Lieutenant Governor (LG) of Delhi, will likely be an exception if the given bill is effectuated.
- **Parliamentary democracy, with a cabinet form of government, is part of the basic structure of the Indian Constitution.**

Counterview:

- There have been repeated political demands for full statehood to be granted to Delhi. However, the demand has been denied on previous occasions based on the following arguments.
 - If Delhi became a part of any constituent State of the Union, that State would sooner or later acquire a predominant position in relation to other States.
 - **Keeping the National Capital under the control of the Union Government is deemed to be vital in the national interest.**
 - If Delhi became a full State, the administration of the National Capital would be divided into rigid compartments of the State field and the Union field. Conflicts would likely arise in vital matters, particularly if the two governments were run by different political parties.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Free and open

The issue of India- U.S. Defence co-operation has been dealt with in the following article:

[21st March 2021 UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis](#)

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. An unconscionable act

The issue of Myanmar refugee issue has been dealt with in the following article:

[21st March 2021 UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis](#)

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products (RODTEP) scheme

- The Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme was announced by the Government of India (GOI) in September 2019.
- Its aim is to boost exports by allowing reimbursement of taxes and duties, which are not exempted or refunded under any other scheme in accordance with the [World Trade Organization \(WTO\)](#) norms.

- RoDTEP is a combination of the Merchandise Export from India Scheme (MEIS) and Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL).
- At present, embedded duties and taxes, which are not refunded under any other scheme, range from 1-3%.
- Under the scheme, a rebate of these taxes will be given in the form of duty credit/electronic scrip.

2. Centre readies draft plan for district-wise export promotion

What's in News?

The government has readied a draft district-wise export promotion plan for 451 districts in the country after identifying products and services with export potential in 725 districts.

- Aiming for double-digit export growth from 500 districts over 3-5 years, the Commerce Ministry has asked States to prepare an annual 'export ranking index' of districts on export competitiveness with the assistance of the [Directorate General of Foreign Trade \(DGFT\)](#).
- The district-specific approach involves the States in identifying potential export sectors and the logistics bottlenecks to be fixed.
- In the initial phase, products and services with export potential in each district have been identified and an institutional mechanism of State and District Export Promotion Committees (SEPC) is being created, with an action plan to grow exports from each district.
- District Export Promotion Committees have been notified in the districts of all the States except West Bengal.

Note:

- While foreign trade constitutes 45% of India's GDP, most export promotion efforts are driven by the Centre.

3. Gandhi Peace Prize for Mujib and Sultan Qaboos

What's in News?

The Culture Ministry has announced that the father of the nation of Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the former Sultan of Oman, the late Qaboos bin Said Al Said, will be awarded the Gandhi Peace Prize for 2020 and 2019, respectively.

This topic has been covered in the [22nd March PIB Summary and Analysis](#).

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following statements with respect to Gandhi Peace Prize:

1. It is an annual award given to individuals only, regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or sex.
2. The jury for Gandhi Peace Prize comprises of the Prime Minister of India, the chief justice of India and leader of the single largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha.
3. The Award is given for Social, Economic and Political transformation through Non-violence.

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

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Gandhi Peace Prize is an annual award instituted by the Government of India since 1995, the 125th Birth Anniversary commemoration year of Mahatma Gandhi.
- The Award is given for Social, Economic and Political transformation through Non-violence.
- This annual award will be given to individuals, associations, institutions or organizations who have worked selflessly for peace, non-violence and amelioration of human sufferings particularly for the less-privileged sections of society contributing towards social justice and harmony.
- The award is open to all persons regardless of nationality, race, language, caste, creed or sex.

Q2. Consider the following statements with respect to Places of Worship (Special Provisions)

Act, 1991:

1. The Act freezes the status of places of worship as it was on January 01, 1991.
2. The Act does not apply to Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri Masjid situated in Ayodhya in the State of Uttar Pradesh.

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: b

Explanation:

- The law was passed in 1991 by the P V Narasimha Rao-led government, the law seeks to maintain the “religious character” of places of worship as it was in 1947.
- The Act freezes the status of places of worship as it was on August 15, 1947.
- Nothing contained in this Act shall apply to the place or place of worship commonly known as Ram Janma Bhumi-Babri Masjid situated in Ayodhya in the State of Uttar Pradesh and to any suit, appeal or other proceeding relating to the said place or place of worship.

Q3. Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) is a permanent organ of which of the following groupings?

- a. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)
- b. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)
- c. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)
- d. BRICS

Answer: b

Explanation:

The Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), headquartered in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, is a permanent organ of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) which serves to promote cooperation of member states against the three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism.

Q4. Consider the following statements:

- 1. Display of National Flag is governed by the provisions of Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950 and Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.
- 2. The Flag Code of India serves as a single reference point about how to properly hoist flag of India with due honour.
- 3. Flag Code of India is an act of parliament.

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

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The display of National Flag is governed by the provisions of two acts viz. Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950 and Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971.
- Further, the government issues non-statutory instructions from time to time.
- The Flag Code of India serves as a single reference point about how to properly hoist flag of India with due honour.
- The Flag Code of India itself is not an act of parliament. It is a set of laws, practices and conventions that apply to the display of the national flag of India.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2021 goes against the principle of representative and parliamentary democracy. Elucidate. (10 marks, 150 words) [GS-2, Polity and Governance]
2. The visit of the U.S. Defence Secretary indicates the importance the new U.S. administration places on its defence relationship with India. Comment. (10 marks, 150 words) [GS-2, International Relations]

