

11 Apr 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

B. GS 2 Related

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [SC hears plea to decriminalise begging](#)

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [India, China agree to avoid new incidents on border](#)
2. [‘India, U.S. differ on rules-based order’](#)

HEALTH

1. [‘Reduce health inequities to tackle pandemic challenges’](#)

C. GS 3 Related

ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. [Dolphin boom in Odisha’s Chilika lake](#)
2. [Indus and Ganges river dolphins are two different species](#)

INTERNAL SECURITY

1. [The ‘armed struggle’ that goes nowhere](#)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. [A dozen quasars discovered](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. [The abolition of FCAT](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. [Steps taken to prevent spread of brucellosis](#)
2. [Another hint of ‘new physics’, this time from Fermilab](#)
3. [Toll mounts as battle for Yemen’s Marib heats up](#)
4. [Meghalaya villagers oppose dam on Umngot](#)

G. Tidbits

1. [Tough corals](#)

2. [Shrinking habitat](#)

H. [UPSC Prelims Practice Questions](#)

I. [UPSC Mains Practice Questions](#)

A. GS 1 Related

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. SC hears plea to decriminalise begging

Context:

- The Supreme Court has asked the Centre and four States to file their response on a plea seeking a direction to repeal the provisions criminalising begging.

Plea in the Supreme Court:

- A plea was filed in the Supreme Court against the provisions of the statute criminalising begging.
- The Supreme Court in February 2021 had sought a response from the Centre, and five States on the plea.
- Despite the notice issued to Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Haryana and Bihar on the plea, only Bihar had so far filed its response.

Arguments by the petitioner:

Provisions violative of constitutional rights:

- The plea claimed that the sections of the statute criminalising begging were violative of constitutional rights.
- The criminalising of begging had put people in a situation to make an unreasonable choice between committing a crime or not committing one and starving, which goes against the very spirit of the Constitution and violates **Article 21 i.e. Right to Life**.
 - As per the 2011 Census, the total number of beggars in India is 4,13,670 and the current number would have only increased from the last census.
- The plea argues that a person, who is compelled to beg due to certain circumstances, cannot be faulted for his actions.

Against socialistic principles:

- The government has the mandate to provide **social security** to everyone and ensure that all had basic facilities, as embedded in the **Directive Principles of State Policy** in the Constitution. The presence of beggars is indicative of the failure of the state to provide basic facilities to all its citizens.

- Criminalising the act of beggary goes against the approach of a **socialist nation as embedded in the preamble of the Indian Constitution.**

Judicial precedent:

- The plea had referred to the August 2018 verdict of the Delhi High Court which had decriminalised begging in the national capital holding that provisions of the **Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959**, which treats begging as an offence cannot sustain constitutional scrutiny.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. India, China agree to avoid new incidents on border

Context:

- 11th round of talks between the Corps Commanders recently held at Chushul.

Background:

- With disengagement complete on both banks of Pangong Tso in February, the focus of the talks was on disengagement from patrolling points (PP) at **Gogra and Hotsprings.**

Details:

- The two sides had a detailed exchange of views regarding disengagement along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.
- The two sides agreed on the need to resolve the outstanding issues in an expeditious manner in accordance with the existing agreements and protocols.
- India and China have agreed that the completion of disengagement at Gogra and Hotsprings would pave the way for the two sides to consider de-escalation of forces and ensure full **restoration of peace and tranquillity and enable progress in bilateral relations.**

2. 'India, U.S. differ on rules-based order'

Context:

- S.'s freedom of navigation operation in India's Exclusive Economic Zone near Lakshadweep.

Background:

UNCLOS:

- Under the **UNCLOS (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea)** there is a 12 nautical mile **territorial sea**, an additional 24 nautical miles as a **contiguous zone** where a country can have some law and order, policing etc., and a 200 nautical mile **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ)** which a country is free to exploit the natural resources like fisheries or sea-bed mining but cannot exercise territorial rights.

FONOP controversy:

- The U.S. has conducted a patrol in the Indian Ocean in India's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) near Lakshadweep.

- While India protested against the U.S. move, the U.S. has argued that it conducted the “**freedom of navigation operation**” (**FONOP**) to challenge what it has termed as India’s excessive maritime claims.

Points of differences:

Prior notification:

- Military ships of other countries can go through even territorial waters of claimant countries on what is called innocent passage.
- However, **India insists on prior notification for passage of military ships not only for its territorial waters but even in its EEZ.**

Straight baseline issue:

- In Lakshadweep, there is another complicated issue called **Straight Baselines, which allows countries to claim a larger area of water around an island group.**
- UNCLOS does not permit continental states like India to claim Straight Baselines, but only archipelago states like Indonesia or the Philippines.
- The U.S. has challenged the use of straight baselines by India in the Lakshadweep islands.

The U.S’s hypocrisy:

- The **S. has itself not ratified UNCLOS.**

Implications:

On bilateral relations:

- The India U.S. bilateral relations have been on the upswing in recent times, especially in the defence domain.
- The change in the Presidentship of the U.S. which was expected to alter India and U.S. bilateral dynamism has not happened. There have been high level visits from the U.S. administration to India.
- However, the recent event may become an **irritant in the India- U.S. relationship.**

On Quad grouping:

- The recent development does not augur well for the Quad grouping.
- **The Quad advocates a rules-based order for the region.** The latest FONOP controversy underlines the fact that both countries have huge differences when it comes to what a “rules-based order” means for the region.
- The difference in understanding of the UNCLOS provisions among the Quad member states of India and India might lead to weakening of the Quad grouping.

Encourage similar moves by other countries:

- The other future scenario to consider is that other countries like the Pakistan may consider similar moves by sending a ship through India’s EEZ, or the Chinese and Pakistanis may carry out a joint exercise there.

- Notably, in a recent development, a Chinese surveillance which came near the Andamans, was allegedly chased away by the Indian Navy.

Category: HEALTH

1. 'Reduce health inequities to tackle pandemic challenges'

Context:

- A study by the Jaipur-based **Indian Institute of Health Management Research (IIHMR)**, on the public health situation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background:

- The rapid spread of the pandemic in the country had led to the loss of livelihood and productivity, increase in poverty and decline in nutrition levels.

Details:

Social determinants of health:

- The study identifying some primary aspects of inequities had noted that **around 40% of the health outcomes could be measured through social determinants**.
- The **lack of accessibility and affordability, poverty, lack of education, inequitable distribution of income and lack of proper nutrition** were the gaps which had caused major concerns in the health sector during the pandemic.

Recommendations:

- There is the need for urgent action for **reducing health inequities in India**. The transformation of public health could only be achieved through equity.
- India needs to adopt an **integrated approach** to address the various determinants at the individual, community and the health system levels. The integrated approach may require the state to work on **aspects such as nutrition and sanitation along with improved access to healthcare facilities**. Along with the bridging of gaps caused by inequities, a larger picture of health should be highlighted through **Sustainable Development Goals** with the focus on **universal health coverage**.
- There is the need for **enhanced global collaboration**. The global health leadership should work together and act beyond borders by sharing resources such as testing kits, treatment drugs and vaccinations with the low-income countries.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Dolphin boom in Odisha's Chilika lake

Context:

- **Dolphin census data** released by wildlife wing of the Odisha State Forest and Environment Department.

Details:

- The population estimation exercise for dolphins and other cetacean species covered almost the entire coast of Odisha.
- Three dolphin species were recorded during the census- **Irrawaddy, bottle-nose and humpback dolphins**.
- The population of dolphins in Chilika and along the Odisha coast has doubled this year compared with last year, thus indicating a spectacular growth in numbers.
 - Of particular interest is the sizeable growth in the population of **endangered Irrawaddy dolphins. The Irrawaddy dolphins are mostly found in Chilika lake**. Apart from Chilika, Irrawaddy dolphins were also sighted in the Rajnagar mangrove division.
 - **Chilika lake is India's largest brackish water lake.**
 - The highest growth has been noticed in the case of **humpback dolphins**. Large groups of humpback dolphins have been spotted near Ekakula and Habelikhati areas, close to the Gahirmatha Olive Ridley nesting ground.
 - The humpback dolphins are not part of any riverine systems and so they cannot be identified as residential mammals.

2. Indus and Ganges river dolphins are two different species

Context:

- Study of the Indus and Ganges river dolphins.

Background:

- The **South Asian river dolphin (Platanista gangetica)** is an **endangered freshwater or river dolphin** found in the region of the Indian subcontinent, which is split into two subspecies, the Ganges river dolphin (P. g. gangetica) and the Indus river dolphin (P. g. minor).
- The Ganges river dolphin is primarily found in the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers and their tributaries in India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, while the Indus river dolphin is now found only in the main channel of the Indus River in Pakistan and in the River Beas (a tributary of the Indus) in Punjab in India.

Details:

- Detailed analysis of South Asian river dolphins has revealed that the **Indus and Ganges River dolphins are not one, but two separate species**.
- The research team studied body growth, skull morphology, tooth counts, colouration and **genetic makeup**. The researchers studied ancient DNA that they got out of skulls and skeletons which were 20 to 30 to even 150 years old.
- The study estimates that Indus and Ganges river dolphins may have diverged around 550,000 years ago.

Ganges Dolphin:

- The Ganges river dolphin **can only live in freshwater** and is essentially blind. They hunt by emitting ultrasonic sounds, which bounces off of fish and other prey, enabling them to “see” an image in their mind.
- The Ganges river dolphin has been recognized by the government of India as its **national aquatic animal**.

Conservation status:

- The Ganges dolphin is a **Schedule I animal under the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972**, and has been included in **Annexure – I of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)**.
- The Ganges River dolphin is classified as ‘**Endangered**’ species by the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**.

Threats:

- Ganges river dolphins once lived in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu river systems of Nepal, India, and Bangladesh. But the species is extinct from most of its early distribution ranges.

Declining river flow:

- The fast declining river flow due to diversion through the barrages has adversely affected the dolphin habitats.

Accidental deaths:

- Previously fishermen used to hunt dolphins and use their oil as bait, though that practice of directed killing has stopped they still end up as accidental catches. The increasingly mechanized boat fleet being used for fishing increase the chances of accidental injury to the dolphins.

River Pollution:

- The point and non-point source of pollution in the Ganges River is severely affecting the dolphin habitat.

Reduced gene flow:

- The **physical barriers such as dams and barrages** created across the river have reduced the gene flow to a great extent making the species vulnerable.

Category: INTERNAL SECURITY

1. The ‘armed struggle’ that goes nowhere

Context:

- The Maoist’s recently conducted an ambush and killed more than 20 paramilitary personnel in the Tarrem area in the Bijapur-Sukma district border in southern Chhattisgarh

Background:

Formation of CPI (Maoist):

- The **CPI (Maoist)** came into being after the merger of two of the strongest Naxalite groups — the **Peoples' War Group (PWG)** and the **Maoist Communist Centre** — in 2004.
 - The PWG was formed in 1980 by Kondapalli Seetharamaiah from the splinter groups that had broken away from the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist), led by general secretary Charu Mazumdar in the early 1970s.
 - The MCC was founded by Kanai Chatterjee in 1975 and had strongholds in the Jharkhand forests.

Modus Operandi:

- The PWG had a sizeable following in the 1980s and 90s in undivided Andhra Pradesh as it had led mass agitations on various issues, including peasant wages and land struggles. The PWG graduated into a military force by forming guerrilla zones in northern Telangana, extending up to the Nallamalla forests.
- Anticipating state actions, a group from the PWG had already moved to present-day Chhattisgarh in the early 1990s and had formed **mass organisations like the Dandakaranya Adivasi Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan (DAKMS)** in the tribal areas in the southern part of Chhattisgarh. The armed cadres of the PWG also used the difficult terrain to build **guerrilla zones**.
- The Indian Maoists have sought refuge in remote forested areas which offer them the camouflage and difficult terrain to engage in guerrilla warfare and to seek support from tribal people living in areas that are either under-developed or have limited access to the institutions of the Indian state.
- The Maoists claim to have set up **"janathana sarkars"** — local government units in places such as the Abujmarh forested areas in southern Chhattisgarh.

Governmental measures:

- The Indian government has launched a **military campaign** against the guerrillas, while taking steps to cut their popular support in remote villages through **developmental work and infrastructure building**.

Pressure on the Maoists:

- The Maoists have been dealt a severe blow by incarcerations and "encounter" killings of senior leaders.
- The Maoists have been facing desertions due to surrenders by cadres to security forces in various States.
- The Maoists have also been at the end of strong attacks by paramilitary and police forces in areas such as the Andhra-Odisha border that is close to south Chhattisgarh, in Gadchiroli in Maharashtra and even as far as the western ghat forests in the tri-state junction between Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.
- The constant pressure on the Maoists has not allowed them to build a workable organisation in new areas, and are being hemmed into what seems to be their last stronghold — South Bastar.

Concerns:

Evolution as a military force:

- The CPI(Maoist) has evolved into a military force. By 2010, the Indian government already identified the Maoists as the **“single biggest internal security challenge”**.

Attacks on security personnel:

- Maoist insurgents, despite facing desertions and counter-attacks, stick to armed struggle, continuing to target security personnel. The recent attack has raised the number of security forces killed in the Bastar region to more than 175 since the killing of 76 CRPF personnel in the Chintalnar attack in April 2010.

Ideology:

- The Indian Maoists have steadfastly held that **violent armed struggle** is a must in its aims to achieve a socialist revolution in India. The CPI (Maoist) **rejects Indian democracy and electoral politics**.
- The Maoists have refused to change their understanding of the nature of the Indian state and continue to insist on an armed struggle.
- The Maoists remain committed to militant insurgency even as they reject any call for recourse to peaceful agitations or to enter the democratic process to further their goal.
- The Maoist movement in India seems headed in the same direction that several violent and failed insurgencies, inspired by the Chinese revolution, went — from the Shining Path in Peru to the Communist Party of the Philippines.

Tribals caught in the crossfire:

- The Indian government's recourse to counter-mobilize tribals into armed resistance groups such as Salwa Judum was met by militant backlash by the Maoists that severely affected the tribal population.
- The Tribals have had to face both severe state repression as well as Maoist violence in the last decade.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. A dozen quasars discovered

Context:

- Astronomers have discovered a dozen quasars.

Quasars:

- Quasars are extremely luminous cores of distant galaxies that are powered by supermassive black holes.
- The Quasars are warped by a naturally occurring cosmic “lens” and are observed as being split into four similar images. Hence they are termed as **“quadruply imaged quasars”** or quads for short.

Significance of the finding:

- This discovery increases the number of known quasars or quads by about 25% and can help determine the expansion rate of the universe and address other unanswered questions regarding the birth and evolution of the universe.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. The abolition of FCAT

Context:

- The **Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021**, issued by the Ministry of Law and Justice.

Background:

Film certification:

- Films meant for distribution in theatres require to be certified as 'U' (unrestricted public exhibition), 'UA' (unrestricted public exhibition subject to parental guidance for children below the age of 12), 'A' (restricted to adult audiences) or 'S' (restricted to specialised audiences such as doctors or scientists) by the **Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC)**.

Concerns with the process:

- According to observers, the CBFC was increasingly getting stacked with people close to the ruling dispensation. Of late, the body has been headed by chairpersons who have ruled with a **heavy hand and ordered cuts to films critical of the government**.
- The clash between the film fraternity and the certification body became more pronounced over the years. Such moves have been criticized for being **against the constitutional right of freedom of express**

Film Certificate Appellate Tribunal:

- The Film Certificate Appellate Tribunal (FCAT) was established in 1983 as a **statutory body under The Cinematograph Act**.
- FCAT had been set up to hear appeals of filmmakers against decisions of the Central Board of Film Certification.

Significance:

- The FCAT has been envisaged as a **buffer for filmmakers**. Before the FCAT, filmmakers had no option but to approach the court to seek redressal against CBFC certifications or suggested cuts.

- The FCAT has often stepped in to **sort out disputes between the CBFC and the filmmakers**.
- Though the decisions taken by the FCAT were not beyond reproach, the FCAT could be credited with **taking quick decisions**.
- Among other objectives, the rationale for setting up the FCAT was to **reduce the burden on courts by functioning as an appellate body**.

Details:

- The ordinance scraps the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT), a statutory body that had been set up to hear appeals of filmmakers against decisions of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), and transfers its function to other existing judicial bodies.
 - The ordinance has amended **The Cinematograph Act, 1952**, and replaced the word 'Tribunal' with 'High Court'.
- **Eight other appellate authorities have also been disbanded** with immediate effect.

Reasons for the ordinance:

- The move to abolish the FCAT along with other tribunals follows a **Supreme Court order in Madras Bar Association vs. Union of India**.
- The two-member Bench had directed the government to constitute a **National Tribunals Commission**.
 - The National Tribunals Commission was envisaged to act as an **independent body** to supervise the appointments and functioning of Tribunals, as well as to conduct disciplinary proceedings against members of Tribunals and to take care of administrative and infrastructural needs of the Tribunals, in an appropriate manner.
- The Supreme Court's recommendations were intended to **strengthen the functioning of the tribunals by addressing the issue of dependence of tribunals on the executive for administrative requirements**.

Concerns:

Against expert committee recommendations:

- The move to abolish the FCAT is surprising as it comes in the backdrop of the recommendations of two influential panels — the Mudgal Committee and the Benegal Committee — both of which suggested an expansion of the body's jurisdiction.
- Neither the **Mukul Mudgal committee** nor the **Shyam Benegal committee** had recommended that the FCAT be scrapped.
 - The Justice Mukul Mudgal Committee had examined the certification process and suggested recommendations.

Over burdening the judiciary:

- With the disbanding of the FCAT, it will be left to the already overburdened courts to adjudicate on appeals against the CBFC orders.
- The role played by the FCAT will now have to be performed by courts.

- With the government tightening its control on over-the-top (OTT) content and ordering players in this area to set up a grievance redressal body to address the concerns of the viewers, many observers point out that the courts will have to play a greater role as an avenue of appeal.

Impact on the filmmakers:

- The recent ordinance will impact filmmakers seeking redressal on certification and cuts.
- The expected delays in the appeal process would only **dis-incentivize the filmmaking fraternity to take up emotive or controversial topics as film subjects**, thus placing an **indirect restriction on right of freedom of expression**.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Steps taken to prevent spread of brucellosis

Context:

- Animal Husbandry officials in Kerala have launched preventive measures after a few cases of brucellosis were detected in animals.

Brucellosis:

- Brucellosis is a disease caused by a group of bacteria from the genus *Brucella*. These bacteria can infect both humans and animals.
- **Brucellosis is a zoonotic infection.** It is a bacterial infection that spreads from animals to people. It affects thousands of people worldwide.
- Most commonly, people are **infected by eating raw or unpasteurized dairy products**. Sometimes, the bacteria that cause brucellosis can **spread through the air or through direct contact with infected animals**.

2. Another hint of 'new physics', this time from Fermilab

- **Fermilab**, housing the **American particle accelerator**, has released the first results from its '**muon g-2**' experiment.
- These results spotlight the anomalous behaviour of the elementary particle called the
 - The muon is considered as a heavier cousin of the electron.
- The results from the study seem to signify the fact that there are new particles in the environment that the Standard Model does not account for.
- This observation together with the recently observed anomaly at CERN indicates that the effects of new yet unobserved particles and forces is being seen as **quantum effects**.

3. Toll mounts as battle for Yemen's Marib heats up

- Fighting for the key **Yemeni region of Marib** has intensified between the pro-government and Houthi rebel fighters.
- The Houthis have been trying to seize oil-rich Marib, the government's last significant pocket of territory in the north.

4. Meghalaya villagers oppose dam on Umngot

- A 210 MW hydroelectric project has been proposed on **Umngot, considered India's clearest river.**
- The dam is proposed on the upstream of the river Umngot in the West Jaintia Hills district of

Context:

- The Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) which had scheduled a public hearing for the proposed project has been obstructed from conducting the public hearing by the villagers of East Khasi Hills district.

G. Tidbits

1. Tough corals

- New findings from Rutgers University say corals will survive climate change.
 - Global warming has put the corals at risk due to bleaching and disease.
- The study attributes this to the Corals capacity to form rock hard skeletons.
 - **Biom mineralisation** is defined as the process of building reefs.

2. Shrinking habitat

- A study of African elephant habitat shows that african elephants' habitat is currently restricted to 17% of what it could be if not for poaching, killing for ivory and other threats from humans.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. The Umngot river is associated with which of the following Indian states?

- a. Nagaland
- b. Mizoram
- c. Meghalaya
- d. Sikkim

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Umngot, considered India's clearest river is associated with the state of Meghalaya.

Q2. Which of the following is wrongly matched?

- a. Marib region: South Sudan
- b. Nagorno-Karabakh region: Azerbaijan
- c. Aleppo: Syria
- d. Kirkuk: Iraq

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Marib is in Yemen. Fighting for the key Yemeni region of Marib has intensified between the pro-government and Houthi rebel fighters. The Houthis have been trying to seize oil-rich Marib, the government's last significant pocket of territory in the north.
- Nagorno-Karabakh region is recognised as part of Azerbaijan, but it is controlled by ethnic Armenians.

Q3. The 'muon g-2' experiment is being carried out in which of the following countries?

- a. China
- b. U.S.
- c. Japan
- d. France

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Fermilab, housing the American particle accelerator, has released the first results from its 'muon g-2' experiment.
- These results spotlight the anomalous behaviour of the elementary particle called the muon.
 - The muon is considered as a heavier cousin of the electron.
- Muon g-2 is a particle physics experiment at Fermilab to measure the anomalous magnetic dipole moment of a muon to a precision of 0.14 ppm, which will be a sensitive test of the Standard Model. It might also provide evidence of the existence of entirely new particles.

Q4. Which of the following statement's is/are correct with respect to brucellosis?

1. It is a zoonotic infection.
2. The disease is caused by a group of bacteria.
3. People are infected by eating raw or unpasteurized dairy products.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Brucellosis is a disease caused by a group of bacteria from the genus Brucella. These bacteria can infect both humans and animals.
- Brucellosis is a zoonotic infection. It is a bacterial infection that spreads from animals to people. It affects thousands of people worldwide.
- Most commonly, people are infected by eating raw or unpasteurized dairy products. Sometimes, the bacteria that cause brucellosis can spread through the air or through direct contact with infected animals.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Though the government's dual strategy of a sustained military campaign against the guerrillas and the simultaneous developmental work has to an extent put the Maoists on the back foot, the insurgent outfit continues to remain a significant threat to India's internal security. Discuss. (15 marks, 250 words)[GS-3,Internal Security]
2. In the light of the recently issued, The Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance, 2021, discuss the concerns associated with the functioning of tribunals in India and also suggest the remedial measures needed to realize the true potential of tribunals in the constitutional set up of India. (10 marks, 150 words)[GS-2,Polity and Governance]