

11 May 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A. GS 1 Related

B. GS 2 Related

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. [Iran confirms that it is in talks with Saudi Arabia](#)
2. [Pakistan government to set new rules to meet FATF requirements](#)

C. GS 3 Related

ECONOMY

1. [SEBI's sustainability reporting norms mandate ESG overview](#)

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. [3 naval ships bring in medical supplies](#)

D. GS 4 Related

E. Editorials

SOCIAL ISSUES

1. [Decoding inequality in a digital world](#)

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. [Vaccine skirmishes](#)

HEALTH

1. [A national health service in India](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. [1 lakh tonnes of grain given under PMGKAY](#)
2. [India variant is of global concern: WHO](#)

G. Tidbits

1. [Taliban, Afghan forces declare Id truce](#)

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. Iran confirms that it is in talks with Saudi Arabia

Context:

Iran's Foreign Ministry for the first time has confirmed that it is holding talks with regional rival Saudi Arabia.

Background:

- The neighbouring countries **cut ties in 2016** after **Iranian protestors attacked Saudi diplomatic missions** following the **kingdom's execution of a revered Shiite cleric**.
- The regional rivals have **backed opposite sides of several regional conflicts**, from Syria to Yemen, where a Saudi-led coalition is fighting the Houthi rebels.
 - Iran backs the Houthis, who are battling the Saudi-led military that intervened in Yemen's war in 2015.
- They have long competed for influence across the Middle East.
 - Saudi Arabia accuses Iran of using proxies to fight wars and weaken Arab states, destabilizing the region.
 - Iran sees Saudi Arabia as a key player in efforts by the United States and Israel to dominate the region and destabilize Iran.

Details:

- Iranian and Saudi officials met in Baghdad in **April 2021**, their **first high-level meeting since Riyadh cut diplomatic ties with Tehran in 2016**.
- The purpose of the talks was both bilateral and regional.

2. Pakistan government to set new rules to meet FATF requirements

Context:

Pakistan is set to introduce **new rules relating to anti-money laundering cases** and **change the prosecution process** to meet its remaining tough conditions to **exit from the FATF grey list**.

Details:

- **Pakistan was put on the grey list** by the Paris-based Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global watchdog for money laundering and terror financing **in June 2018** and the country has been struggling to come out of it.
- Based on the measures that Pakistan takes, the FATF would conclude if Pakistan has **complied with three outstanding benchmarks, out of 27, that blocked its exit from the grey list in February 2021**.

This issue has been covered in the **18th February 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. SEBI's sustainability reporting norms mandate ESG overview

Context:

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has issued a circular notifying the **new disclosure norm on sustainability-related reporting** for the top 1,000 listed companies by market capitalization by FY23.

Market capitalization:

- Market capitalization, generally referred to as “market cap” is the market value of a publicly-traded company’s outstanding shares.
- Market cap is equal to the share price multiplied by the number of shares outstanding.

Details:

- Such reporting will be under a new **Business Responsibility And Sustainability Report (BRSR) format**.
- It is a significant step towards **bringing sustainability reporting at par with financial reporting**.
- The companies will need to provide an overview of their material environmental, social, governance risks and opportunities and approach to mitigate or adapt to the risks along with financial implications.
 - The **social-related disclosures** will cover the workforce, value chain, communities and consumers.
- Companies will have to disclose the gender and social diversity of employees, including measures for differently-abled employees and workers, occupational health and safety and trainings.
- On the community front, **companies need to make disclosures on social impact assessments (SIA), rehabilitation and resettlement and corporate social responsibility**.
- For consumers, they have to make disclosures on product labelling, product recall and complaints in respect of data privacy and cybersecurity.

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. 3 naval ships bring in medical supplies

Context:

Operation Samudra Setu II.

Details:

- Nine ships have been deployed for COVID relief operation ‘Samudra Setu II’ for shipment of Liquid Medical Oxygen and associated medical equipment from friendly foreign countries in the **Persian Gulf and South-East Asia**.
- Navy’s **landing ship tank INS Airavat** arrived from Singapore with eight cryogenic oxygen tanks and other critical COVID medical stores.

- **INS Trikand and INS Kolkata** returned to India with oxygen-filled containers from West Asia.
- Two more warships were en route to India from Kuwait and one ship was at Brunei to embark with medical supplies.

Indian Air Force Initiative:

- **Indian Air Force (IAF)** aircraft carried out **sorties from various parts of the country**, airlifting oxygen containers, other medical supplies and equipment.
- IAF aircraft also carried out **international sorties**. The equipment has been procured from Singapore, Dubai, Thailand, United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, Australia, Indonesia and Israel.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Decoding inequality in a digital world

Background:

Economic fallout of the pandemic:

- The existing **economic inequality has further increased** during the pandemic.
 - People in the formal sector have faced little or no economic fallout. The super-rich have even become richer. However, the bulk of the Indian population is suffering a huge economic setback. While people in the unorganized sector have faced widespread job losses, even those who did not lose jobs have had to face large income shocks.

Impetus to digitization:

- The novel coronavirus **pandemic has accelerated the use of digital technologies in India**, even for essential services such as health and education.

Concerns:

- What is concerning is the fact that apart from the immediate economic setback brought out by the pandemic, well-recognised channels of economic and social mobility — **education and health — are getting rejigged** in ways that would only further increase the existing inequalities.
- Poor people have poor access to health and education in India. The increasing digitization of these critical sectors is only adding to the woes of the poor to access the services.
- **Digitization seems to be exacerbating the already existing inequalities**, especially by raising the barrier for people to receive services they are entitled to.

Education sector:

- While the switch to online education has helped ensure a semblance of uninterrupted education, the access to it has not been necessarily equitable.
- While the switch to online education has been seamless for the privileged, yet **a significant number of the most vulnerable are struggling to access online education**, due to the following reasons.

Lack of digital devices:

- According to National Sample Survey data from 2017, only 6% of rural households and 25% of urban households have a computer.

Lack of internet connectivity:

- **Access to Internet facilities is not universal in India.**
- Available data notes that only 17% in rural areas and 42% in urban areas have access to the internet. However, it is to be noted that smartphones with data have improved access over the past four years since the 2017 survey.
- **Lack of stable connectivity** is also a major concern in India.

Economic condition of the family:

- Surveys by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the Azim Premji Foundation, ASER and Oxfam suggest that between 27% and 60% could not access online classes for a range of reasons: **lack of devices, shared devices, inability to buy “data packs”, etc.**

Lack of learning environment at home:

- Children from poor families lack a learning environment at home. A quiet space to study is a luxury for such children.
 - 25% of Indians lived in single-room dwellings in 2017-19.
- **Girl children are expected to contribute to domestic chores** if they are at home. This reduces the time available for them to access online education.

Loss of peer learning opportunities:

- Peer learning has suffered due to the switch to online education given that students are missing out on the opportunity to learn from fellow students that is an inevitable outcome of the social interaction in classrooms. This is all the more significant for children coming from poor households who have to face the burden of lack of domestic support in learning.

Health sector:

- The poor in India have poor access to good health care services due to the following reasons.
 - **India has very low public spending on health (barely 1% of GDP).** As a result, the **share of ‘out of pocket’ (OOP) health expenditure (of total health spending) in India was over 60%** in 2018.
 - This is much higher than countries like the U.S. with a highly privatised health system where the OOP was merely 10%.

- **The private health sector in India is poorly regulated in practice.** This has led to them charging very high for their services and thus leading to a scenario where their services become unaffordable for the poor.
- Given the challenges posed by the current health crisis in the form of shortage of essentials: drugs, hospital beds, oxygen, vaccines, etc, the focus of the administration seems to be on increasing digitization of the sector.
 - Example: Efforts being made at developing apps like CoWIN.
- However, there are some concerns associated with this trend of digitization in the health sector.

Digital illiteracy:

- Digital technologies are creating extra hurdles. Along with the paperwork, patients will have to navigate **digi-work**.
 - The use of CoWIN to book a slot makes it that much harder for those **without phones, computers and the Internet**. Also, the website is only available in English which limits its usefulness for the non-English speaking population in India.
- Platform- and app-based solutions can exclude the poor entirely, or squeeze their access to scarce health services further.

Privacy concerns:

- Experts have voiced their concerns over the attempts to use the pandemic to create an infrastructure for future exploitation of people's data.
 - The digital health ID project with a **centralised database model** is being pushed during the pandemic.

For related information refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 16th Aug 2020](#)

- Making **Aadhaar mandatory to register on CoWIN platform** for vaccination registration is a cause of concern.
- Given that **India lacks a data privacy law**, it is very likely that health records will end up with private entities without the data owner's consent, even weaponized against them (e.g., private insurance companies may use it to deny poor people an insurance policy or charge a higher premium).

Ineffective in addressing the core issues:

- Digital "solutions" **create additional bureaucracy** for all sick persons in search of these services without doing enough to punish the overcharging private hospitals or people indulging in hoarding and black marketing.
- Unless health expenditure on basic health services is increased, apps such as Aarogya Setu, Aadhaar and digital health IDs can do little to help improve the ailing health sector.
- **Digital solutions only seem to be obfuscating and distracting us from the real problem.** The health sector needs **policy, not technocratic solutions**.

Conclusion:

- **Technological changes in education and health are worsening the existing inequities.** The privileged are getting ahead not necessarily because they are smarter, but because of the privileges they enjoy as compared to the poor sections.
- The pandemic should nudge us to be **more discerning about which digital technologies to embrace** especially in sectors like education and health which are critical for social mobility in a society like India.

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Vaccine skirmishes

Background:

- The United States has declared its support for a **temporary waiver of the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreement** for COVID-19 vaccines.

For more information on this refer to:

CNA dated May 7 2021: Intellectual property waiver for Covid-19 vaccines

- The proposal for a temporary waiver has been **rebuffed by major EU nations** and met with counter-suggestions. **Germany has threatened that it would create “severe complications” for the production of vaccines**, echoing the view of major pharma corporations.
- France has been relatively less hostile to considering the proposal and has called for refraining from blocking the export of raw materials for vaccine production.

Concern:

- Though the proposal for a temporary waiver sounds like a well-intentioned, pro-developing-countries policy stance it must be noted that the **IPR waiver will not entirely resolve the vaccine deficit issue.**

For more information refer to:

UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 10th May 2021

Recommendations:

- The following **supplemental measures** may be necessary to address the vaccine shortage in some countries like India and other developing nations.
 - The grant of a waiver would have to be accompanied by a **“tech transfer”** that provides generic pharmaceutical manufacturers with the requisite **trained personnel, raw materials and hi-tech equipment and production know-how**. The pharmaceutical companies should be persuaded to share their technology willingly, agreeing to **joint ventures** to increase global production expeditiously.
 - There should be appropriate science-based measures to **test and certify the safety, immunogenicity and protective efficacy of the vaccines** that would be produced by generic manufacturers.

- The **global supply chains for vaccine production** should be examined to avoid major disruptions.
- The short term measures to address vaccine shortfalls could include **developed nations sharing their vaccine stockpiles**, particularly in cases where the latter exceed projected domestic need. The **pharma companies should be financially incentivized to produce more doses at affordable prices** to donate directly to the countries in need.

Category: HEALTH

1. A national health service in India

Background:

Structural issues in the healthcare system of India:

- The health crisis brought out by the pandemic has exposed the problems of the healthcare system in India.

Low public spending:

- India has very low public spending on health (barely 1% of GDP).
- Though India's public spending on health is set to double in the 2021-22 financial year, it continues to remain **grossly inadequate when compared to the levels in other similar developing nations**.

High out of pocket expenditure:

- The share of 'out of pocket' (OOP) health expenditure (of total health spending) in India was **over 60% in 2018**.
 - Medical expenses constitute the major reason for personal debt in India and have **pushed many into poverty**.

Regional inequality:

- India's fragmented, **urban-centred, variably functional and grossly underfunded primary health centres and elite-focused healthcare system** cater to only a small section of the population.
 - In certain rural areas, the doctor-population ratio is over 1:40,000.

Lack of regulation of private health sector:

- The private health sector in India is poorly regulated in practice.
 - Some private healthcare providers have objected to public authorities' orders on widened patient access during the ongoing health crisis.

Details:

- The article argues for a national health service in India modelled on the **British National Health Service**.

British National Health Service:

- The service is **funded entirely from general taxation** and the general public receive treatment solely according to their clinical needs without any exception.
- The system includes payment to general practitioners, most of whom remain private providers but are paid by the state for treating NHS patients.
- **All hospital treatment and medicines are free**, as are outpatient and follow-up appointments. Only a proportion of patients in England have to pay for prescription items.
- The NHS is the largest employer in the U.K. Its **current budget is about 7.6% of GDP**, and it **provides highly localised access to care**.
- It has resulted in the provision of top-class universal healthcare, including **training and research**.
- It **integrates preventive and curative medicine** at all levels.

Additional information:

- According to the Lancet Planetary Health journal, air pollution accounted for 1.7 million deaths in India in 2019. The annual business cost of air pollution is currently estimated at \$95 billion, which is about 3% of India's GDP.

F. Prelims Facts

1. 1 lakh tonnes of grain given under PMGKAY

What's in News?

Of the 40 lakh tonnes of free food-grains promised under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, one lakh tonnes has been distributed so far.

This topic has been covered in the **24th April 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis**.

2. India variant is of global concern: WHO

What's in News?

The World Health Organization has said that the B.1.617 variant of coronavirus first identified in India is being classified as a variant of global concern.

- The double mutant strain of SARS-CoV-2 reported in India is scientifically named B.1.617.
- The double mutant Covid variant is a concern as the Union health ministry said in its statement that "such mutations confer immune escape and increased infectivity" to the coronavirus.
- Studies have shown reduced efficacy of vaccines against the double mutant strain of SARS-CoV-2.

G. Tidbits

1. Taliban, Afghan forces declare Id truce

What's in News?

The Taliban and Afghan government declared a **three-day ceasefire** for the Id-ul-Fitr holiday.

- The Taliban and the government have declared **similar ceasefires in the past to mark Islamic holidays**.
- The decision **comes in the backdrop of a sharp spike in violence** as the US goes about withdrawing its remaining troops from Afghanistan.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following statements regarding Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) is/are correct?

1. PMGKAY is a part of Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) to help the poor fight the battle against Covid-19.
2. The scheme is aimed at providing each household covered under the National Food Security Act with an additional 5 kg grains (wheat or rice) for free, in addition to the 5 kg of subsidised food grain already provided through the Public Distribution System (PDS).
3. The central Govt. and the state Govts will share the burden of expenditure on account of intrastate transportation in the ratio of 90:10.

Select the correct option from below:

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) is a part of Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Package (PMGKP) to help the poor fight the battle against Covid-19.
- PMGKAY provides 5 kg of rice or wheat (according to regional dietary preferences) per person.
- The foodgrains will be allocated free-of-cost at 5 Kg per person per month to the beneficiaries covered under the National Food Security Act, 2013 (NFSA) over and above NFSA foodgrains.
- It is being operated by the Department of Food and Public Distribution under the Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution.
- The Government of India is bearing 100% financial burden.

Q2. Consider the following statements regarding Tanjore paintings:

1. They are painted mostly on cloth and vellum.
2. They depict a liberal use of golden leaf.
3. Lord Krishna and his life is a major theme of these paintings.

Select the correct answer using the options given below:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Tanjore painting is popularly known as 'palagaipadam' which means picture on a wooden plank as most of these pictures are etched on solid wood boards.
- They depict a liberal use of golden leaf.
- Lord Krishna and his life is a major theme of these paintings.

Q3. Which of the following is part of the 'Charter of Duties' of the Indian Coast Guard?

1. Safety and Protection of Artificial Islands and Offshore Terminals
2. Protection of Fishermen
3. Assistance to Fishermen in Distress at Sea
4. Preservation and Protection of Marine Environment
5. Prevention and Control of Marine Pollution

Select the correct option from below:

- a. 1, 2 & 3
- b. 1, 2, 3 & 4
- c. 2, 3 & 5
- d. All of the Above

Answer: d

Explanation:

'Charter of Duties' of the Indian Coast Guard include:

1. Safety and Protection of Artificial Islands and Offshore Terminals
2. Protection of Fishermen
3. Assistance to Fishermen in Distress at Sea
4. Preservation and Protection of Marine Environment
5. Prevention and Control of Marine Pollution
6. Assisting the Customs and other authorities in anti-smuggling operations
7. Enforcement of Maritime Laws in Force
8. Safety of Life and Property at Sea
9. Collection of Scientific Data

Q4. Consider the following statements:

1. Jal Jeevan Mission is being implemented in partnership with States/UTs to provide safe tap water to every rural home by 2034.
2. Puducherry has become India's first 'Har Ghar Jal' UT by ensuring that every rural home in the Union Territory gets a household tap connection.
3. For Jal Jeevan Mission there is assured fund available under the 15th Finance Commission tied-grant to RLB/PRIs for water & sanitation.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 3 only
- d. All of the Above

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Jal Jeevan Mission is being implemented in partnership with States/UTs to provide safe tap water to every rural home by 2024.
- JJM is implemented to enable every rural home in the villages to have Functional Household Tap Connections (FHTC) by 2024.
- Andaman and Nicobar became India's first 'Har Ghar Jal' UT by ensuring that every rural home in the Union Territory gets a household tap connection.
- Puducherry is the fourth state/UT after Goa, Telangana, Adaman and Nicobar Islands to provide assured tap water supply to every rural home under the Union Government's Jal Jeevan Mission.
- For Jal Jeevan Mission there is assured fund available under the 15th Finance Commission tied-grant to Rural Local bodies /Panchayati Raj Institutions for water & sanitation.

Q5. What is the role of ultraviolet(UV) radiation in the water purification systems?(UPSC 2012)

1. It inactivates/kills the harmful microorganisms in water.
2. It removes all the undesirable odours from the water.
3. It quickens the sedimentation of solid particles, removes turbidity and improves the clarity of water.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Ultraviolet water purification is the most effective method for disinfecting bacteria from the water. Ultraviolet (UV) rays penetrate harmful pathogens in the water and destroy illness-causing microorganisms by attacking their genetic core (DNA).
- It does not remove undesirable odour from the water.
- It does not play any role in the sedimentation of solid particles and does not remove turbidity.

Q6. Consider the following statements: (UPSC 2018)

1. In the first Lok Sabha, the single largest party in the opposition was the Swatantra Party.
2. In the Lok Sabha, a "Leader of the Opposition" was recognised for the first time in 1969.
3. In the Lok Sabha, if a party does not have a minimum of 75 members, its leader cannot be recognised as the Leader of Opposition.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- In the first Lok Sabha, the single largest party in the opposition was the Communist Party of India.
- In the Lok Sabha, a "Leader of the Opposition" was recognised for the first time in 1969.
- The leader of the largest Opposition party having not less than one-tenth seats of the total strength of the House is recognized as the leader of the Opposition in that House. In case of Lok Sabha, it is one tenth of 545 seats.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Technological changes in education and health are worsening inequities. In the light of this statement, evaluate the rising inequality in a digital world. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, Governance]
2. Is it time for India to have a National Health Service based on the British model? Discuss. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, Governance]