

13 May 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. [‘Child marriages may go unnoticed amid lockdown’](#)

Context:

- With the ongoing lockdown in the state of Karnataka and the weddings being restricted to houses because of tough guidelines, there are **fears of child marriages** going unnoticed.

Background:

- The 2020 lockdown witnessed a slew of child marriages being reported in Karnataka.
- **A total of 2,180 child marriage cases were reported in Karnataka as per reports of Childline (1098) from April 2020 to January 2021.**
 - The other complaints ranged from illegal adoptions, child trafficking and child labour to the need for medical help or shelter.
- The number of complaints eased when lockdown restrictions were relaxed but were still worrying.

Details:

- The Karnataka State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) expects the number of child marriages to go up, given that another lockdown is in place and marriages are being allowed in homes.
- Earlier, when child marriages happened at wedding halls, temples, etc., there were people who would alert the relevant authorities or activists who would be able to reach on time to stop the marriage. But now, with marriages happening at homes, **the authorities would be getting fewer alerts.**

Factors at play:

- The increasing number of child marriages could be attributed to the factors ranging from **insecurity for the girl**, wherein the parents assume their responsibility is over with her marriage, to the fact that they could get away with a simple marriage without calling too many people, resulting in less expenditure. The increased **financial strain** on the poor has also contributed to some families resorting to child marriage.

Recommendations:

- There is a need to **create awareness among the people on the ills of child marriage.**
- People should alert Childline if they come across child marriages.
- The district authorities should constitute a **committee to tackle child marriages** and they should **conduct regular inspections in the most vulnerable areas.**

B. GS 2 Related

Category: HEALTH

1. COVID-19 catastrophe could have been avoided, says report

Context:

- The “COVID-19: Make it the Last Pandemic” report prepared by the **Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response**.
 - The panel notes that the catastrophic scale of the COVID-19 pandemic could have been prevented with appropriate interventions but the **failure at multiple levels** led to the catastrophic effect of the pandemic.

Failures:

- The **lack of transparency in reporting the initial cases by China** was an important contributing factor to the outbreak.
- Early responses to the outbreak detected in Wuhan, China, in December 2019 “lacked urgency” as many countries failed to heed the alarm. The poor coordination among the global institutions and nations meant **the warning signs went unheeded**.
- The report also notes with concern that the **institutions “failed to protect people”**. The panel said the **WHO could have declared the situation a Public Health Emergency of International Concern much earlier but failed to do so**. This resulted in eroding the potential of early actions in such situations. It was only in March after the WHO described it as a pandemic that countries were jolted into action.
- The science-denying leaders in some countries also **eroded public trust in health interventions and aided the spread of the pandemic**.

Way forward:

- The **global alarm system needs to be overhauled** to ensure timely alerts which can help initiate appropriate countermeasures.
- The report recommends the **overhauling of the WHO** to make it less cautious and give it **more authority** to send expert missions into countries immediately without waiting for their approval.
- To tackle the ongoing pandemic, the panel calls on the richest countries to donate a billion vaccine doses to the poorest. The WHO and the [World Trade Organization](#) should also get major vaccine-producing countries and manufacturers to agree to **voluntary licensing and technology transfers for vaccines**.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. WTO chief targets waivers for COVID vaccines in Dec.

Context:

- **World Trade Organisation (WTO) Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala's** statements.

Details:

IP waiver issue:

- The WTO DG has said that given the urgent need to vaccinate the world faster, she was pushing for **member-nations to reach some agreement by July** and deliver a final outcome on the intellectual property (IP) waivers for COVID-19 vaccines at the **next WTO ministerial conference scheduled in Geneva in December**.

- The WTO DG appreciated the fact that **India has exported more than 40% of the vaccines** and do so despite some countries' refusal to share their domestic production with other countries in dire need.

Package on agriculture:

- She has expressed hope that WTO could come up with a package on agriculture that would ensure a balance between the interests of both the developed and developing countries.
- The package on agriculture would include the following aspects.
 - Addressing the issue of **public stockholdings** and making these provisions permanent, while ensuring appropriate transparency in its functioning. This would help meet food security concerns on a permanent basis.
 - Public stockholding (PSH) is a policy tool used by governments to procure, stockpile and distribute food when needed. Governments purchasing at prices higher than market prices are considered to be subsidising their farmers, under WTO rules.
 - **The stockholding programmes are considered to distort trade** when they involve purchases from farmers at prices fixed by the governments.
 - The **Bali peace clause** stipulates that no country would be legally barred from food security programs for its own people even if the subsidy breached the limits specified in the WTO Agreement on Agriculture.
 - **Domestic support to agriculture** also needs review.
 - Under the Agreement on Agriculture, all domestic support in favour of agricultural producers is subject to rules. In addition, **the aggregate monetary value of Amber Box measures is, with certain exceptions, subject to reduction commitments** as specified in the schedule of each WTO Member providing such support.

Issues related to industries:

- Industrial subsidies need to be reviewed.
 - The **WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures** (also known as the Subsidies Agreement or the SCM Agreement) establishes multilateral disciplines on the use of subsidies and provides mechanisms for challenging government measures that contravene these rules.

C. GS 3 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POVERTY AND HUNGER

1. A bullet train to hunger

Background:

Socio-economic impact of the pandemic:

- The pandemic and associated lockdowns have brought miseries upon millions of poor and vulnerable in India.
- Apart from the healthcare crisis, the poor are having to deal with **hunger and nutritional insecurity and also a sense of uncertainty about their livelihoods**.
 - As per the State of Working India report 2021 of Azim Premji University, nearly half of formal salaried workers moved into informal work between late 2019 and late 2020 and the poorest 20% of the households lost their entire incomes in April and May 2020. This indicates **massive job and income losses**.
 - Considering even the low national minimum wage threshold of Rs. 375 per day (Anoop Satpathy Committee), 23 crore individuals have been pushed below these minimal earnings. Consecutively, **poverty rates have increased**.
 - The 'Hunger Watch' (HW) has noted the **impact on nutritional security** due to the pandemic. The access to nutritional food has decreased owing to reduced incomes.
 - The survey focussed on understanding the hunger and livelihood situation among marginalised communities such as daily wage workers, single women households, people with disability, etc.
 - As per conservative estimates, there are at least 33 crore poor households in India. The lack of access to food can plunge this section of the population into irredeemable levels of **starvation and malnutrition**.
 - The impact has been even worse on sections of the society considered most vulnerable like the minorities, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, old age people, women. The pandemic has had a **disproportionate impact on some of these more vulnerable communities**.

The rural-urban divide:

- Several surveys and reports have indicated a **higher impact on the urban population as compared to the rural population due to the pandemic**.
 - **Incomes reduced** by half/quarter for more than half the urban respondents while it was a little over one-third for rural respondents. In October, in rural areas, 26% had no income while 30% had no income in urban areas.
 - **Poverty rates** in rural areas have increased by 15 percentage points and by 20 percentage points in urban areas.
 - For one in five rural respondents, the **nutritional quality of food** remained "more or less the same" in October compared to pre-pandemic levels. This was doubly worse for urban respondents.

Social security schemes:

Food security schemes:

- Under the **National Food Security Act (NFSA)**, 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population are entitled to 5 kg of foodgrains each month at subsidised prices.
- Under the **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana**, an additional entitlement of 5 kg of foodgrains per individual and 1 kg of pulses per household for free was given to those who hold Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) cards under the NFSA. AAY cardholders fall under the extremely poor category.
- Supplementary rations were also made available under various State schemes.

Concerns:

- The NFSA suffers from exclusion issues due to identification errors as well as using old population estimates.
- PDS entitlements fall far short of minimal nutritional requirements for a healthy society.

MGNREGA:

- There has been a 47% increase in person-days of work under the **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)** in 2020-21 compared to 2019-20 and a record 72 lakh households completed 100 days of work in one year.
- The avenue for **guaranteed employment in rural areas** has perhaps cushioned the impact of income loss in rural areas as compared to urban areas.

Recommendations:

- The pandemic has highlighted the importance of expanding social security nets. NFSA and **MGNREGA** have demonstrated the role they can play in addressing social and economic distress.
- **The government must bear the responsibility of social protection** and must consider implementing the following measures.
 - The Central government **must expand the coverage and quantity under the NFSA** for at least one year. Given that there are over 100 million tonnes of food grain stocks in the **Food Corporation of India** warehouses (as of May 1), the government can even consider universalizing the scheme.
 - **Increase MGNREGA entitlements** to 200 days per household.
 - Initiate consultations for an **urban employment programme**.
 - Offer a **wage compensation** of Rs. 7,000 per poor household for the next few months.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. A hundred days after the coup

Context:

- **ASEAN leaders' summit in Jakarta.**
 - The single most important agenda of the summit was to devise a way to defuse the **ongoing crisis in Myanmar**.

Background:

Military coup in Myanmar and associated violence:

- On February 1, the military overthrew the elected government of Myanmar after the landslide victory of the Aung San Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy (NLD) in the November 2020 elections.
- Civilians have clashed with police and army units wielding batons, rubber bullets and live ammunition. The military leadership has been brutal in the suppression of the protests. 750 were killed, thousands injured, and over 2,500 detained.
- There has been a stalemate given the differing solutions being offered by the army on the one hand and the opposition on the other.

ASEAN mediation:

- Given the deep concerns over the coup's adverse regional impact, the **ASEAN** group, despite its **central concept of non-interference in internal affairs of its member states**, followed its **activist tradition to assist Myanmar in exiting from this complex situation**.
- It was in this direction that it has resisted efforts by other organizations or nations to interfere in the ongoing crisis and organized an **emergency summit at Jakarta and invited the military leadership of Myanmar for the talks**.

For more information on this development, refer to:

CNA dated April 25, 2021: ASEAN leaders urge junta to end killings

Important outcomes of the Jakarta summit:

- **Five-Point Consensus** including the immediate cessation of violence; supply of humanitarian assistance; constructive dialogue; and ASEAN's mediation through the visit by a special envoy of ASEAN's Chair and the ASEAN Secretary-General has been accepted by the military.
- Though not included in the five-point consensus, **calls for release of all political prisoners including foreigners were also heard by the army**.
- **International reactions to the Jakarta summit outcome have largely been positive**. The UN and other global stakeholders appreciate Southeast Asia's willingness to resolve its problems in its 'family way'.

Challenges for ASEAN in its efforts:

Bridge internal differences:

- Members like Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam inclined to be sympathetic to the military and others like Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore are keen to mediate in the Myanmar crisis for the region's larger good.

Chasm within the international community:

- The U.S., the U.K. and the European Union have advocated a policy of condemnation and strong sanctions against the military regime, while China and Russia have argued against excessive censure and opposition.

India's role:

- **As a neighbour with vital stakes, India has welcomed the ASEAN initiative.**
 - India and Japan have preferred to support reconciliation.
- India should **unreservedly back ASEAN's endeavours**, helping it further by extending requisite support to the member nations.

Conclusion:

- ASEAN has created a rare pathway to help Myanmar move forward.
 - Despite its initial opposition to the Jakarta agreement, the opposition in Myanmar would need to internalise the utility of a helping hand extended by the region.
 - Myanmar's leaders should work for a **lasting reconciliation**, deriving inspiration from Lord Buddha's 'Middle Path'.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Protecting prisoners

- The **Arnesh Kumar vs State of Bihar (2014) judgment** of the S.C. dealing with the process of arrest, directs the police not to effect unnecessary arrests, especially in cases that involve jail terms less than seven years.
- **Section 436A of the Cr.P.C.**, allows undertrials who have completed half of the maximum prison term prescribed for the offence to be released on personal bond.

G. Tidbits

1. Inflation eases to 4.29%; base lifts IIP

Data from the National Statistical Office:

- India's retail inflation slowed to a three-month low of 4.29% in April, helped by **softer food prices as well as a base effect**.
- The industrial output surged by 22.4% in March, aided by the **statistical impact** of the year-earlier period's **Index of Industrial Production (IIP)** being significantly lower on account of the national lockdown to contain COVID-19 imposed that month.
- Though some experts have pointed out that the inflation and IIP data provided strong positive signals for the economy, others have pointed out to the fact that these figures are related to the period 'just prior to the extensive rounds of lockdowns induced by the ongoing second COVID wave' and have also emphasised that inflation and IIP data over the next three months were likely to be 'significantly distorted' by base effects.

2. 'Remote working spurs demand for cyber experts'

- Remote working, new ways of managing workflows and efforts to ensure business continuity during the lockdowns have made **companies increasingly vulnerable to cyberthreats**. This has exponentially increased the risk of cybersecurity failures.
- To combat this, global enterprises are beefing up their cybersecurity to avoid possible catastrophes.

- Demand for cybersecurity professionals has more than doubled now from a year earlier after **cybersecurity emerged as a key concern following the pandemic**.
- In 2021 alone, India will require some 70,000 people with crucial skills such as application development security, cloud security, risk management, threat intelligence, incident response, data privacy and security strategy.

3. EdTech needs an ethics policy

- Since the onset of the pandemic, online education has replaced conventional classroom instruction. This has led to the **increasing use of EdTech apps**.
- **The EdTech apps collect large quantities of data** from the learners through the gadgets that the students use. These provide data about the learner's surroundings along with intimate data about the students.
- **The privacy of students who use EdTech apps for learning is at risk.**
 - The **lack of a regulatory framework in India along the lines of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe** could impinge on the privacy of students who use educational technology (EdTech) apps for learning. Private data collected by an EdTech company can be misused or sold to other companies with no oversight or protection.
 - Children use these apps without parent or adult supervision. Intrusion of privacy can happen unnoticed.
- Given these realities, it is necessary to **formulate an ethics policy for EdTech companies** through the active participation of educators, researchers, parents, learners and industry experts. Issues of **fairness, safety, confidentiality and anonymity of the user** would have to be dealt with.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q.1 The Bolshevik Party and its revolution was concerned with which country?

- a. France
- b. Russia
- c. Venezuela
- d. Turkey

Answer: b

Explanation:

- In 1917, leftist revolutionaries led by Bolshevik Party leader Vladimir Lenin launched a nearly bloodless coup against the Duma's provisional government and seized power. This is referred to as the October Revolution of Russia or the Bolshevik Revolution.

Q.2 Which states/UT's are involved in the Cauvery river dispute?

- 1. Karnataka
- 2. Tamil Nadu

3. Kerala
4. Puducherry
5. Andhra Pradesh

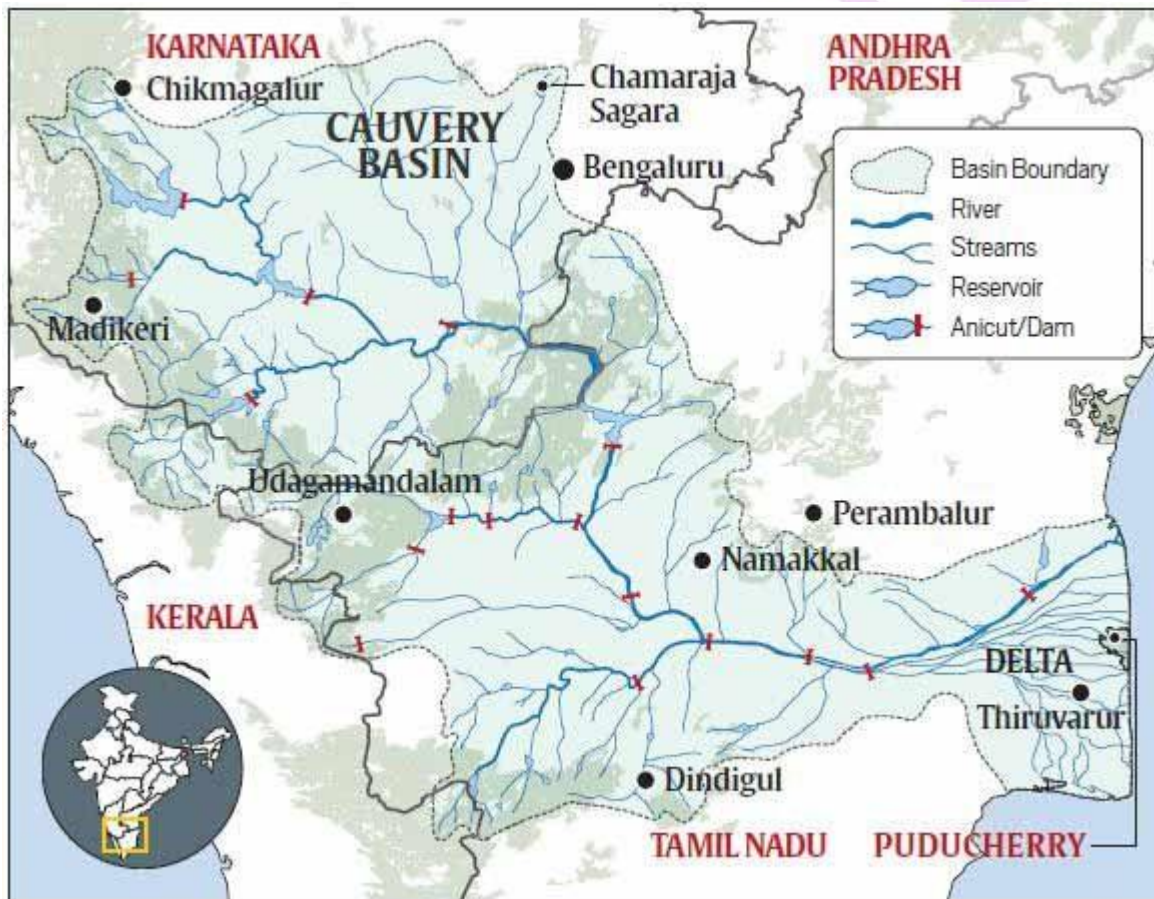
Options:

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1, 2 and 3 only
- c. 1, 2, 3 and 4 only
- d. 1, 2, 4 and 5 only

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Cauvery river basin is spread across Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry.



Q.3 What is Iron Dome of Israel?

- a. A sacred religious site which is revered by both Palestinian Muslims and Israeli Jews
- b. An advanced cyber weapon developed by Israeli intelligence to target Iran's critical infrastructure

- c. A mobile all-weather air defense system designed to intercept and destroy short-range rockets and artillery shells
- d. Israel's naval blockade of Gaza strip to deny essential supplies to Hamas militants in the Gaza strip

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Iron Dome is a mobile all-weather air defense system developed by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries. The system is designed to intercept and destroy short-range rockets and artillery shells.

Q.4 Which of the following statement/s is/are correct?

- 1. The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is compiled and published monthly by the National Statistical Office (NSO) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
 - 2. Index of Industrial Production (IIP) represents the status of production in the industrial sector for a given period of time as compared to a reference period of time.
- a. 1 only
 - b. 2 only
 - c. Both 1 and 2
 - d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is a composite indicator that measures the short-term changes in the volume of production of a basket of industrial products during a given period with respect to that in a chosen base period. It shows the growth rates in different industry groups of the economy in a stipulated period of time.
- The Index of Industrial Production (IIP) is compiled and published monthly by the National Statistical Office (NSO) (formerly known as Central Statistical Organization) under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

Q.5 The terms 'Event Horizon', 'Singularity', 'String Theory' and 'Standard Model' are sometimes seen in the news in the context of -

- a. Observation and understanding of the Universe
- b. Study of the solar and the lunar eclipses
- c. Placing satellites in the orbit of the Earth
- d. Origin and evolution of living organisms on the Earth

Answer: a

Explanation:

- Event horizon, boundary marking the limits of a black hole. At the event horizon, the escape velocity is equal to the speed of light. Since general relativity states that nothing can travel faster than the speed of light, nothing inside the event horizon can ever cross the boundary and escape beyond it, including light. Thus, nothing that enters a black hole can get out or can be observed from outside the event horizon.
- A gravitational singularity, spacetime singularity or simply singularity is a location in spacetime where the density and gravitational field of a celestial body is predicted to become infinite by general relativity.
- In physics, string theory is a theoretical framework in which the point-like particles of particle physics are replaced by one-dimensional objects called strings. String theory describes how these strings propagate through space and interact with each other.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Imprisonment practices need a relook so that the police do not effect unnecessary arrests. Evaluate the statement in the context of prison reforms. (250 words; 15 marks) [GS-2, Polity and Governance]
2. ASEAN has created a rare pathway to help Myanmar move forward from its political crisis. Examine. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, International Relations]