

17 May 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: GEOGRAPHY

1. Five killed as gale force winds, rain pummel Kerala, Karnataka

Context:

Gale-force winds, heavy rainfall and high tidal waves swept the coastal belt of Kerala, Karnataka and Goa as Cyclone Tauktae hurtled northwards towards Gujarat.

Read more on Cyclonic storm Tauktae covered in [16th May 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Gale-force winds

- A gale force wind is a strong, persistent wind with a **minimum speed of 50 km/h (31 mph) and a maximum speed of 102 km/h (63 mph)**, which are **typically associated with coastal regions**.
- Typically, these strong winds are caused by a **rapid drop in air pressure**.
- **Cyclones are classified on the basis of wind speed**.
- If the **Deep Depression develops gale force wind speeds of between 63–88 km/h (39–54 mph)**, it is called a **Cyclonic storm**.

Details:

- According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), **Tauktae**, which has intensified into a **very severe cyclonic storm**, is **likely to intensify further** and reach the Gujarat coast.
- The water level in many dams across Kerala rose after heavy rain in the catchment areas.
- The [Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services](#) (INCOIS) and IMD forecast damage over Porbandar, Amreli Junagarh, Gir Somnath, Botad, Bhavnagar, and the coastal areas of Ahmedabad.

Read more on Cyclone Tauktae covered in [15th May 2021 PIB Summary and Analysis](#).

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. UNSC calls for end to violence in Gaza

What's in News?

UN Secretary-General pleaded for an **immediate end to the deadly violence in Gaza**, warning that the fighting could plunge the region into **an uncontrollable security and humanitarian crisis**.

Details:

- The heaviest fighting in years is sparked by unrest in Jerusalem.
- Israel's Army said that about **3,000 rockets had been fired from the coastal strip towards Israel** (the highest ever) of which about **450 failed launches fell in the Gaza Strip**.
- Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system had intercepted over 1,000 rockets.

Read more on [Iron Dome System](#).

- The intensity of the conflict is unprecedented with non-stop airstrikes in densely populated Gaza and rockets reaching big cities in Israel.

Read more on this issue covered in [12th May 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Way Forward:

- The UN, Qatar and Egypt are trying to broker a ceasefire.
- The trust deficit between Israel and Palestinian authorities is increasing, as there have been no direct negotiations between the two. Efforts are necessary to create conducive conditions for the resumption of talks between Israel and Palestine.

Also read: [Israel Palestine Conflict: RSTV- Big Picture](#) Gist.

2. Fighting resumes in southern Afghanistan

Context:

Fighting between the Taliban and Afghan government forces resumed ending a three-day ceasefire agreed to mark Id-ul-Fitr.

This topic has been covered in the [11th May 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Background:

- President Joe Biden has announced the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan by September 11 in his effort to end America's longest war.
- The deadline for Biden's withdrawal is significant as **September 11, 2021, is 20 years after the 9/11 terror attacks in New York, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania** that led the US to target Afghanistan.
- Around **7,000 non-U.S. forces from mainly NATO countries**, also from Australia, New Zealand and Georgia, **outnumber the 2,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan**. They too have announced a **withdrawal from Afghanistan in coordination with a U.S. pull-out**.

This topic has been covered in the [15th April 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Adoption issues to the fore as COVID-19 leaves many orphaned

Context:

The second wave of COVID-19 has left many children extremely vulnerable, particularly those who have been orphaned.

Details:

- **Only a district Child Welfare Committee could decide the future of children found orphaned** in such circumstances.
- The CWC would first make efforts to find members of the birth family and then make an assessment.

This issue has been covered in the [15th May 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

Kinship care:

- **Children having faced crisis such as a loss of a family member** or separation from their parents due to death and desertion **experience high emotional trauma**.
- Experts have suggested that **adoption for such children was neither the first nor the best option**, and **recommended kinship care** as a more suitable alternative.
 - The intervention required in such situations is **assistance and support for the prevention of family separation**.
- Where relatives are interested to help, they could follow the **Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956**, or the [Juvenile Justice Act, 2015](#), to adopt or **seek legal custody** under the **Guardianship and Wards Act, 1890**.
- It is suggested that the Ministry of Women and Child Development and all State departments concerned should immediately **roll out a kinship care programme** and make it part of foster care provisions under the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015.
- State governments must make kinship care part of the child protection system such as **Maharashtra's Bal Sangopan Yojana**, where the **State grants educational support of ₹1,000 per month** to families to look after orphaned children.

C. GS 3 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. It is getting from bad to worse for women workers

Background:

Gender inequality in India:

- India has slipped from 112 to 140 amongst 156 countries in the 2021 **WEF Global Gender Gap Report**. Of the four pillars of the index, **India suffered mainly in economic participation**.
- **Gender inequality subsists in the Indian economy** as in other sectors like health, education and politics.
 - The **labour participation of women is 22 per cent in India, one of the lowest in the world** (comparable countries have 50 per cent).
 - The **wage gap** between men and women across the Indian economy is a marked feature in India.
 - Despite the fact that the number of women has increased in jobs, still, they lag behind in the total percentage of jobs. **The gender employment gap is substantial** given that only 18% of working-age women are employed as compared to 75% of men (Pre-pandemic statistics).
 - Reasons include a lack of good jobs, restrictive social norms, and the burden of household work.

Economic impact of the pandemic:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a **massive disruption of the labour market** in India, rendering millions unemployed and has led to a sudden and large increase in poverty.

Details:

- The pandemic seems to have worsened the situation of gender inequality in India.
- The pandemic has affected more women than men. **Women workers, in particular, have borne a disproportionate burden of the pandemic and the associated lockdowns.**

A widening economic gap:

- Data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy Pvt. Ltd. show that 61% of male workers were unaffected during the lockdown while only 19% of women experienced this kind of **work security**.
- Women have lost more jobs irrespective of the industry in which they were employed.
- Unlike men who had the option of moving into fallback employment arrangements like self-employment and daily wage work, women seemed to have far fewer options.

- 47% of employed women who had lost jobs during the lockdown, had not returned to work, while the number stood at only 7% for men.
- Nearly half of the women workers, irrespective of whether they were salaried, casual, or self-employed, withdrew from the workforce, as compared to only 11% of men.
- Even as new entrants to the workforce, women workers had poorer options compared to men. Women were more likely to enter as daily wage workers while men found avenues for self-employment. This leads to **more precarious work and lower earnings** as compared to men.

Growing domestic work:

- With the lockdowns in place and almost everyone limited to the confines of their homes, household responsibilities have increased for women. **There has been a massive increase in the burden of household work for women.**
 - The India Working Survey 2020 found that among employed men, the number of hours spent on paid work remained more or less unchanged after the pandemic. But for women, the number of hours spent in domestic work has increased manifold. This increase in household work came without any accompanying relief in the hours spent on paid work.
- This could lead to a situation where married women and women from larger households are less likely to return to work, suggesting that the burden of care may be a reason for **poor employment recovery.**

Recommendations:

Short term measures:

- Expansion of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act ([MGNREGA](#)).
- Introduction of an **urban employment guarantee** targeted at women.
- There should be coordinated efforts by states to **facilitate the employment of women** while also addressing immediate needs through the setting up of community kitchens, prioritising the opening of schools and anganwadi centres.
- The governments should consider a **COVID-19 hardship allowance** of at least Rs. 5,000 per month for six months for 2.5 million accredited social health activists and Anganwadi workers, most of whom are women.

Long term measures:

- **The National Employment Policy**, currently in the works, should systematically **address the constraints around the participation of women's workforce**, both with respect to the availability of work and household responsibilities.

- The government should come up with **policies for sectors where women participation can be significant**, both in current (healthcare, IT, education, agriculture) and emerging (artificial intelligence, blockchain) areas.
- The government should focus on **increasing public investment in social infrastructure** like health, education, child and elderly care. This can help bring women into the workforce not only by directly creating employment for them but also by alleviating some of their domestic work burdens.
- Given the close link between educational attainment and economic participation and the big drop in enrolment of girls in primary (93 per cent), secondary (62 per cent) and tertiary (29 per cent) education, relevant interventions like [Skill India](#) should develop programmes for girls/women and address the systemic issues.
- There is the need to embrace **policies for inclusion** that help women progress in career, with up-skilling and “return-to-career” schemes, flexi-work, special leave, wage parity, hybrid working models, and so on. **A concerted effort across key sectors with a cultural focus on gender sensitivity** instead of gender neutrality can help.

Conclusion:

- In the pandemic, women have borne a disproportionate burden of the severe disruptions to life and the economy.
- **The govt and businesses must join hands to empower women economically.** This apart from the obvious **social benefit of gender equality** will also give a **big boost to the GDP** of the nation.
 - The global GDP could rise by as much as \$28 trillion by 2025 if, for instance, women play an equal role to men in labour markets. If small, medium and large businesses — both domestic and MNCs — join hands with the government to close the gender gap in economic empowerment, **India could add at least a trillion annually to its GDP by 2029.**
 - Companies with more women representation have achieved 22 per cent higher productivity, 40 per cent better customer retention and 27 per cent more profitability.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Restructuring the tribunals system

Background:

- The Centre has abolished several appellate tribunals and authorities and transferred their jurisdiction to other existing judicial bodies through **the Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance 2021.**

For more information on this topic, refer to:

[Tribunals in India](#)

- The Tribunals Reforms (Rationalisation and Conditions of Service) Ordinance 2021 has been challenged in the Supreme Court.

Concerns:

- The Ordinance has met with sharp criticism for the following reasons.

Bypassing the normal legislative process:

- By taking the **ordinance route** the government seems to have bypassed the usual legislative process thus depriving the legislature of its right to discuss and deliberate on the issue.

For more information on the concerns regarding ordinances refer to:

[CNA dated April 20, 2021: The ordinance route is bad, repromulgation worse](#)

Impact of the abolishment of tribunals:

- The abolishing of several tribunals such as the Film Certification Appellate Tribunal **without any stakeholder consultation** will have a profound impact on the stakeholders.

For detailed information on this issue refer to:

[CNA dated April 11, 2021: The abolition of FCAT](#)

- Despite the Supreme Court's direction in **Roger Mathew v. South Indian Bank (2019)**, **no judicial impact assessment** was conducted prior to abolishing the tribunals through this Ordinance.

Against the judicial direction:

- While the Ordinance has incorporated the suggestions made in **Madras Bar Association v. Union of India (2020)** on the composition of a search-cum-selection committee and its role in disciplinary proceedings, it has fixed a four-year tenure for Chairpersons and members of tribunals thus blatantly disregarding the court's direction for fixing a five-year term.

Non commission of NTC:

- The Centre is yet to constitute a **National Tribunals Commission (NTC)**, an independent umbrella body to supervise the functioning of tribunals, the appointment of and disciplinary proceedings against members, and to take care of administrative and infrastructural needs of the tribunals.
 - The idea of an NTC was first mooted in [Chandra Kumar v. Union of India \(1997\)](#).
- The lack of an institutional body like the NTC will fail to deter **executive interference in the functioning of tribunals** in matters of appointment and removal of tribunal members, as well as in the provision of finances, infrastructure, personnel and other resources required for the day-to-day functioning of the tribunals.
- Such a scenario can lead to a situation where the system can be used to serve political or private interests.

Significance of NTC:

- The NTC would ideally take on some duties relating to administration and oversight. A 'corporatised' structure of NTC with a Board, a CEO and a Secretariat will allow it to scale up its services and **provide requisite administrative support to all tribunals across the country**. The NTC could pave the way for the separation of the administrative and judicial functions carried out by various tribunals.
- The NTC functioning as an umbrella authority can support uniform administration across all tribunals.
- The NTC could set performance standards for the efficiency of tribunals and their own administrative processes. This can help **increase efficiency as well as ensure better accountability**.
- It could function as an independent recruitment body to develop and operationalize the procedure for disciplinary proceedings and the appointment of tribunal members. Giving the NTC the authority to set members' salaries, allowances, and other service conditions, subject to regulations, would **help maintain tribunals' independence**.

Recommendations:

- The Finance Ministry which has been vested with the responsibility for tribunals until the NTC is constituted should come up with an appropriate transition plan.
- The way to reform the tribunal system is to look at solutions from a systemic perspective supported by evidence. **Establishing the NTC** will definitely entail a radical restructuring of the present tribunals system.
- Developing an independent oversight body like the NTC requires **a legal framework** that protects its independence and impartiality. The NTC must be established vide a **constitutional amendment or be backed by a statute** that guarantees it functional, operational and financial independence.

F. Prelims Facts

1. Virus situation worsens among tribals

What's in News?

The **COVID-19 situation** appears to have worsened in certain **areas inhabited by Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in Odisha.**

- Many individuals belonging to the Dongria Kondh community and Bonda community have tested positive for COVID-19.
 - **Dongria Kondh is a PVTG in the Niyamgiri Hill range** of Rayagada district in Odisha.
 - Bonda community is a PVTG in **Bonda Hill in Malkangiri district.**

Read more on this topic covered in the [15th May 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.](#)

2. Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia (INSACOG)

- The government had launched the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomic Consortia (INSACOG), comprising **10 labs spread across India to ascertain the status of new variants of SARS-CoV-2 in the country.**
- It would monitor the **genomic variations in the SARS-CoV-2 on a regular basis** through a **multi-laboratory network.**
- It has a **high-level Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee.**
- Also, it has a **Scientific Advisory Group** for scientific and technical guidance.
- The 10 identified laboratories of INSACOG Consortium **report their sequencing results to the Central Surveillance unit of the National Centre for Diseases Control [NCDC]** from where it is shared with the **State Surveillance Units (SSUs) of Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP) by the Central Surveillance Unit (CSU).**

G. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q 1: Consider the following statements:

1. India formally recognized Israel in 1992 when full diplomatic relations were established between India & Israel.
2. No Indian Prime Minister has made an official visit to Israel.

3. India has never voted in support of Israel at the UN or any of its committees.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- India officially recognised the State of Israel on 17th September 1950, whereas full diplomatic ties were established only in 1992.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India visited Israel in 2017 at the invitation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel, marking the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.
- In 2019, India voted in support of Israel at the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).
 - India voted in favour of Israel at ECOSOC to deny observer status to “Shahed”, a Palestinian Human Rights organization (a terrorist organization according to Israel) from securing an observer status at the United Nations.

Q 2: Which of the following is/are weapons India has purchased from Israel?

- 1. Heron
- 2. SPYDER
- 3. Chinook
- 4. Python

Select the correct option from below:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- India has purchased Heron, SPYDER and Python from Israel.
- Heron is a Medium Altitude Long Endurance (MALE) unmanned aerial system (UAS) for strategic and tactical missions developed by **Israel** Aerospace Industries.
- The SPYDER (Surface-to-air PYthon and DERby) is an Israeli short and medium range mobile air defence system developed by Rafael Advanced Defense Systems.
- Python refers to a family of missiles developed by Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems.
- The Boeing CH-47 Chinook is an American twin-engine, tandem rotor, heavy-lift helicopter.

Q 3: Consider the following statements:

1. Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is an advisory body of the Ministry of Women & Child Development.
2. CARA is designated as the Central Authority to deal with inter-country adoptions.
3. India has not ratified the Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption, 1993.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. Only 1
- b. Only 2
- c. Only 3
- d. All of the above

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) is an autonomous and statutory body of the Ministry of Women and Child Development set up in 1990.
- It functions as the nodal body/central authority for the adoption of Indian children and is mandated to monitor and regulate in-country and inter-country adoptions.
- India signed and ratified the Hague Convention on Intercountry Adoption in 2003.

Q 4: Consider the following statements:

1. National Tribunals Commission (NTC) is an independent autonomous body responsible for oversight as well as administration of tribunals, constituted in 2019.
2. The establishment of NTC was suggested by the Supreme Court in the Rojer Matthew case (2019).

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

- a. Only 1
- b. Only 2
- c. Both
- d. None

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The Centre is yet to constitute a National Tribunals Commission (NTC).
- The idea of an NTC was first mooted in *L. Chandra Kumar v. Union of India* (1997).
- It would be set up as an independent autonomous body responsible for oversight as well as administration of tribunals, also to oversee selection, appointment, salaries and service conditions of tribunal members.

Q5. Which of the following National Parks is unique in being a swamp with floating vegetation that supports a rich biodiversity? (UPSC 2016)

- a. Bhitarkanika National Park
- b. Keibul Lamjao National Park
- c. Keoladeo Ghana National Park
- d. Sultanpur National Park

Answer: b

Explanation:

- a. The Keibul Lamjao National Park is located in Manipur.
- b. The national park is characterized by a unique floating decomposed plant material locally called phumdi.
- c. It is a floating national park with floating vegetation that supports a rich biodiversity.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Discuss the concerns associated with abolishing appellate tribunals and the need for establishing the National Tribunal Commission. (10 Marks, 150 Words) (GS 2 Polity and Governance)
2. The COVID-19 pandemic is having devastating social and economic consequences further exacerbating inequalities and creating new vulnerabilities for women. Comment. (10 Marks, 150 Words) (GS 1 Social Issues)

