

18 May 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Why and how of creating a district

Context:

Malerkotla has been declared the 23rd district of Punjab.

Details:

- **Section 5** of the **Punjab Land Revenue Act, 1887** states: “State government may, by notification, vary the limits and alter the numbers of tehsils, districts and divisions into which the State is divided”.
- According to the **2011 Census**, there were **593 districts in the country**.
- Between **2001-2011**, as many as **46 districts were created** by States.
- **Currently, there are 718 districts** in the country (Know India – a website run by the Government).
 - The surge in number is also **due to the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh** into A.P. and Telangana in 2014.

How are new districts carved?

- The **power to create new districts** or alter or abolish existing districts rests with the **State governments**.
- This can either be **done through an executive order** or by **passing a law in the State Assembly**.

How does it help?

- States argue that **smaller districts lead to better administration and governance**.
- **Example:** the Assam government issued a notification to upgrade the Majuli sub-division to the Majuli district for **administrative expediency**.

Are there any exceptions?

- The State government has been vested with unrestrained powers under Section 5 of the Punjab Land Revenue Act, 1887 to create new districts.
- However, this power is generally held **temporarily in suspension only during active census operations or during the delimitation exercise of Lok Sabha/Vidhan Sabha constituencies**.

What role does the Central government have?

- The **Centre has no role to play in the alteration of districts or creation of new ones**. States are free to decide.
- The **Home Ministry has a role to play** when a State wants to **change the name of a district or a railway station**.

Category: HEALTH

1. ICMR drops plasma therapy from COVID treatment norms

Context:

According to the advisory from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the use of **convalescent plasma has been dropped from the recommended treatment guidelines for COVID-19.**

Details:

- The **PLACID trial** in 2020 (a trial by the ICMR on 400 patients) **found no significant benefit** from the use of plasma.
- The National Task Force of the ICMR, along with experts from the Health Ministry, **periodically updates guidelines** on recommended modes of treatment.
- However, **registered doctors are not bound** by the task force recommendations.

Convalescent Plasma therapy:

Convalescent Plasma therapy involves **transfusing certain components from the blood of people who have recovered from a virus attack** into people who are very sick with the virus or people who are at high risk of getting the virus.

This topic has been covered in **PIB Summary & Analysis for 11th April 2020.**

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Is India's Palestine policy evolving?

Context:

At the [United Nations Security Council](#), India reaffirmed its support for Palestine.

Details:

- However, India stopped short of making any direct reference to the status of Jerusalem or the future Israel-Palestine borders.
- India's Permanent Representative to the UN said: "**India reiterates its strong support for the just Palestinian cause** and its unwavering **commitment to the two-state solution.**"
- **India has expressed deep concern** over the **violence in Jerusalem**, especially on Haram esh-Sharif/Temple Mount during the holy month of Ramzan and about the possible eviction process in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighbourhood in East Jerusalem.

Read more on this issue covered in **12th May 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis.**

- India has also **urged both sides to refrain from attempts to unilaterally change the existing status quo**, including in East Jerusalem and its neighbourhood.
 - Here, it is **Israel that is trying to unilaterally change the status quo** by moving to **evict the Palestinian families**, and deploying troops to the Al-Aqsa compound.

Also read: **Israel Palestine Conflict: RSTV- Big Picture Gist.**

Evolving position:

- India's recent comments point to its evolving position on the larger Israel-Palestine issue.
 - India called for the status quo relating to East Jerusalem.

- However, the crucial point that was missed is that **East Jerusalem should be the capital [of a future Palestinian state]**.
- Earlier, this was India's stand regarding the two-state solution. This portion is now taken out.
- **Until 2017, India's position** was that it **supported "the Palestinian cause** and called for a negotiated solution resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, **with East Jerusalem as its capital**, living within secure and recognised borders, side by side at peace with Israel".
- **India dropped the references to East Jerusalem and the borders in 2017** when Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas visited Delhi.
- At present, while **India is firmly putting the two-state solution on the table**, it made **no reference to East-Jerusalem as Palestine's capital**, it opines that the contours of the boundaries must be discussed, settled and recognised by the parties.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Armed forces on alert as Tauktae begins landfall

Context:

Cyclone Tauktae began the process of **landfall on the Gujarat coast**.

Read more on [Cyclone Tauktae](#).

Steps taken:

- **Men and assets were mobilised by the armed forces** in preparation for Cyclone Tauktae.
- At least 1.5 lakh people were moved to safer areas in Gujarat and [National Disaster Response Force \(NDRF\)](#) personnel were deployed in the State.
- **Gujarat being a critical supplier of oxygen from ports to other States**, efforts were on to ensure the **routes were kept open** and also opened at the earliest after the cyclone made landfall.
- Considering the pandemic situation, the Army provided assistance for making **standby arrangements including oxygen, power supply and physical safety** at all COVID hospitals.
- **Diving teams** were kept on standby and **flood rescue teams, medical teams** were earmarked for immediate response and deployment.
- Three naval ships — **Talwar, Tarkash and Tabar** were on standby with aid and relief material.
- Indian Air Force deployed **aircraft to transport personnel and material of the National Disaster Response Force** to Ahmedabad.
- **Fishermen are the most vulnerable in a cyclone** and other such adverse weather phenomena in view of the **smaller size of their boats and limited protection gears** with them.
 - The Coast Guard Remote Operating Stations were incessantly relaying **weather alert messages in vernacular languages on MMB** radio for the seafarers and fishermen.
- **Navtex warnings** were issued regularly and **International Safety Net was activated** to alert the vessels in/transiting through the area.

Read more on **Disaster Management in India – Types of Disaster Management**

Note:

- Storms are common in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea in May, ahead of the monsoon onset.
- While cyclonic activity is comparatively less intense in the Arabian Sea, high-intensity severe cyclones originate frequently in the Bay of Bengal.
- Arabian Sea cyclones are also relatively weak compared to those emerging in the Bay of Bengal.
- Bay of Bengal witnesses more number of cyclones in a given year as compared to the Arabian Sea. This is because:
 - The Bay of Bengal is warmer than the Arabian sea, it is able to provide the heat energy needed to sustain the low-pressure system.
 - The Bay of Bengal receives higher rainfall and a constant inflow of freshwater from the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers. This means that the Bay's surface water keeps getting refreshed, making it impossible for the warm water to mix with the cooler water below, making it ideal for depression.
 - The absence of a large landmass between the Pacific and the Bay allows cyclonic winds to easily move into the Bay of Bengal.
 - Low-pressure system originating from the Pacific Ocean also travel towards the left to the Bay of Bengal.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. The Biden push-button to West Asia's diplomatic resets

Context:

- Major West Asian nations have recently embarked on **unprecedented diplomatic engagements** with erstwhile rivals in the region.

Background:

Saudi Arabia and Iran conflict:

- Saudi Arabia and Iran are seen as the two major powers of the region which are in pursuit of regional hegemony.
- The **political and economic rivalry between the two countries** has been exacerbated by religious differences and sectarianism in the region. Iran is largely Shia Muslim, while Saudi Arabia sees itself as the leading Sunni Muslim power.

- The two countries have provided varying degrees of support to opposing sides in nearby conflicts, including the civil wars in Syria and Yemen.
- The Iran–Saudi Arabia proxy conflict is also sometimes referred to as the **Middle Eastern Cold War**. American support for Saudi Arabia and its allies as well as Russian and Chinese support for Iran and its allies have drawn comparisons to the dynamics of the Cold War era.

Blockade on Qatar:

- **Saudi Arabia, UAE, Bahrain and Egypt had severed diplomatic relations with Qatar** and banned Qatar-registered planes and ships from utilising their airspace and sea routes, along with Saudi Arabia blocking Qatar's only land crossing.
- The Saudi-led coalition cited Qatar's alleged support for terrorism as the main reason for their actions. Qatar acknowledged that it had provided assistance to some Islamist groups (such as the Muslim Brotherhood). Qatar's deepening relation with Iran and Turkey were other unstated reasons for the blockade.

Turkey's strained relations:

- Turkey has huge differences with Egypt over Libya, the **East Mediterranean waters** and Turkey's affiliation with the Muslim Brotherhood.
- Turkey has not shared good relations with Saudi Arabia which has been marked by enmity and distrust. While Turkey and Saudi Arabia are major economic partners, the two have a **tense political relationship, deemed from the historic enmity**.

Diplomatic engagements:

Saudi Arabia and Iran:

- The officials of the two nations met for the first time since diplomatic ties were broken in early 2016.
- The two nations have set up technical committees to look at specific topics.

Qatar:

- The diplomatic and economic blockade on Qatar that was imposed by Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt has been removed.
- Qatar has been making efforts to mend ties with both Saudi Arabia and Egypt, while also making similar initiatives with its doctrinal and political ally, Turkey.

Turkey's diplomatic outreach:

- Turkey has been making efforts to mend its relations with countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia.
 - Turkey and Egypt had their first diplomatic meeting in Cairo after they had broken diplomatic ties in 2013. The two countries, on opposite sides on almost all regional issues, are now exploring how to address their differences.
 - Turkey has made several overtures to Saudi Arabia. Turkey has indicated it could work with the Saudis against the Houthis and has even offered to sell its advanced drones to Saudi Arabia.

Factors aiding the new developments:

The US West Asian policy:

- The major driving force behind the unprecedented engagements in the region is U.S. **President Joe Biden's signalling of a fresh U.S. approach to West Asian affairs.**
 - Unlike the previous regime, the new President has signalled a **tough line on Saudi Arabia**, including closer scrutiny of its human rights record and strong opposition to the Saudi backed war in Yemen.
 - Though the **U.S. could also re-enter the nuclear agreement with Iran**, Iran continues to harbour concerns over the terms of the negotiations and the limitations it could impose on its regional role.
 - **Turkey's increasingly close ties with Russia and its actions in Syria viz-a-viz the Kurds (considered a U.S. ally)** have not gone down well with the U.S. administration. Turkey which has been a close ally of the U.S. in the recent past and continues to be a major NATO power is witnessing a more hostile U.S. policy. The **U.S. administration's recent recognition of the Armenian "genocide"** being an example of the same.
- The new U.S. approach seems to be pushing the regional powers to engage in unprecedented diplomatic engagements to protect their self-interests.
- That the U.S. is now likely to be less engaged with the region's quarrels and the overwhelming need for the **regional states to be responsible for regional security** has been pushing the erstwhile rivals into diplomatic engagements.

Economic condition:

- The **novel coronavirus pandemic** has devastated West Asia. Besides the health crisis brought out by it, the pandemic has severely damaged regional economies.
- The **low crude oil prices** have been creating uncertainties for the producer states in the region.
- The dire economic condition in the region may be incentivizing engagement in the region as higher bilateral engagement which can lead to **lower geopolitical tensions and increased trade relations** can go a long way in helping revive the fragile economies.

Recognition of the limitations of proxy wars:

- One major factor that is encouraging the interactions among rivals is the recognition that the ongoing regional conflicts, in Syria, Yemen and Libya, despite the massive death and destruction, have **yielded no military outcome and have only burdened the supporting nations.** This realization calls for fresh diplomatic approaches to resolve the ongoing conflicts.
 - The lethal attacks from the precision missiles of the Houthis, said to have been provided by Iran, are a threat to the national infrastructure of Saudi Arabia.
- The **"shadow war" on oil and merchant vessels in the Gulf waters and the Red Sea** could escalate into a larger conflict with dire consequences for the two nations.
- The nations have had to pay a **heavy financial price** for their rivalry by having to fund their proxies in the region while also having to spend on military purchases.

Enlightened self-interest:

- **Turkey now sees Egypt as a valuable partner** to promote peace in Libya and pursue their interests jointly in the East Mediterranean by challenging Greece, Israel and Cyprus.
- Egypt has been seeking regional support for its differences with Ethiopia and its diplomatic outreach can be seen as an attempt at **garnering regional support** for itself.

Significance of the new engagement:

- The diplomatic engagements could, going forward, **possibly end ongoing conflicts** that have caused large scale destruction and fatalities in several countries of the region.
- The **western powers have dominated regional affairs** for at least a couple of centuries, and the pursuit of their own interests, have only nurtured deep animosities between the nations of the region and led to a sense of insecurity across West Asia. This had made them increasingly dependent on western alliances to ensure their interests. The unprecedented **initiatives being taken up by the regional countries without the heavy hand of western powers is a welcome relief for the interests of the region.**

Challenges:

- These are very early days and all sides concerned have a long way to go in resolving their differences.
 - Egypt remains uneasy about Turkey's ties with the Brotherhood and its regional ambitions.
 - Saudi Arabia has concerns about Turkey's doctrinal affiliations and its relations with Iran.
 - The resolution of the **Syrian conflict** will be a difficult challenge given the **competing strategic interests** of Saudi Arabia and Iran in the conflict.

Recommendations:

- Though states in West Asia appear poised to negotiate their strategic interests without outside intrusion, given that regional contentions are inter-connected, **third-party facilitators will be needed to promote mutual confidence.** Given its close ties with all the regional states, India is well-placed to play such a role.
- Any future regional cooperation among the countries of the region must have provisions for participating states to **uphold regional peace and promote mutually beneficial cooperation in energy, economic and logistical connectivity areas.**

Category: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

1. Walk the talk on TRIPS waiver

Background:

Supreme Court's observations:

- The Supreme Court bench, while considering the suo-moto case in **Re-Distribution of Essential Supplies and Services During Pandemic**, had opined that since COVID-19 was a public health

emergency, the situation was apt for **invoking emergency powers under the Patents Act** to increase the affordability and accessibility of the medicines and vaccines.

- The bench had asked the Centre why it was not considering options like **compulsory licensing and government authorization using powers under Sections 92 and 100 of the Patents Act**.
 - Section 92 of the Patents Act is a special provision enabling the Central Government to issue compulsory licenses for the manufacture of patented drugs in a public health emergency.
 - Section 100 of the Patents Act enables Central Government to use patented inventions for government purposes.

Government's affidavit:

- The Centre had told the Supreme Court that it is **not in favour of exercising emergency powers under the Patents Act**, at this stage based on the following arguments.
 - Since India is in discussion with WTO members on a temporary **TRIPS** waiver, any exercise of statutory powers under the Patents Act could be counter-productive for India's demand at WTO.
 - The availability of raw materials and essential inputs is the main constraint in the current scenario and therefore any additional licenses may not result in increased production.

For detailed information on this issue refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 14th May 2021](#)

Concerns:

- Though a temporary waiver on TRIPS provisions is a necessity, it is **uncertain when the TRIPS waiver would be adopted, or what conditions it would be subjected to**. Thus the government's stand to wait for a WTO waiver does not warrant merit.
- India is **failing to utilize the existing flexibilities** under the Patents Act of 1970, such as compulsory licences, which are consistent with the TRIPS agreement. This would not require India to wait for a WTO waiver.
- The government's stand on the issue of compulsory licensing is not only **contradictory with India's position at the WTO** but also severely undermines it. This could prove to be counter-productive for India as and when the negotiations at WTO begin.

Recommendations:

- India must **take a consistent stand on IPRs on COVID-19 medical products both internationally and domestically**.
- The government needs to **make aggressive use of Sections 92 and 100 of the Patents Act** to license all patents necessary to make COVID-19 medical products, without waiting for a private party to apply for a licence.
- The government should consider not only **transferring Covaxin's technology** to domestic pharmaceutical companies, to boost national supplies, but also **offer it to foreign corporations**.

Significance of such an approach:

- Such an approach would help demonstrate India's resolve to walk the talk on the TRIPS waiver and also put **pressure on developed countries to transfer their vaccine technology to developing countries.**
- Though the usefulness of compulsory licences for COVID-19 vaccines in the absence of technology transfer is questionable, it can be used to **augment the supply of drugs and other therapeutics** which too are critical in the fight against the pandemic.
- An assertive posture on compulsory licences would also have the advantage of **forcing several domestic pharmaceutical companies to offer licences voluntarily.**

For related information on the proposed TRIPS waiver refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 7th May 2021](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. Two Al-Badr militants killed in Srinagar

What's in News?

Two Al-Badr militants were killed near Srinagar's Khonmoh area.

Al-Badr:

- Al-Badr is a **terrorist group operating in the Kashmir region.**
- The group was allegedly formed by the **Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in 1998.**
- **India and the United States** have **declared it a terrorist organisation** and banned it.
 - Al-Badr was banned by India under the [Unlawful Activities \(Prevention\) Act, 2004.](#)

G. Tidbits

Nothing here for today!!!

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Consider the following pairs:

Terrorist Group	Region
1. Al-Badr	West Africa
2. Al-Shabaab	East Africa
3. Boko Haram	Nigeria

Which of the above is/are correctly matched?

- 1 and 3 only
- 2 and 3 only
- 1 only
- 1, 2 and 3

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Al-Badr operates in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir in India.
- The group was allegedly formed by the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in 1998.
- Al-Badr was banned by India under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 2004.
- Al-Shabaab operates in East Africa, especially in Somalia and Yemen.
- Boko Haram operates in Nigeria. It is based in northeastern Nigeria, which is also active in Chad, Niger and northern Cameroon.

Q2. With reference to carving out a new district in a State, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. The power to create new districts or alter or abolish existing districts rests with the State Government with the consent of the Central Home Ministry.
2. It can be changed only by passing a law in the State Assembly.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The power to create new districts or alter or abolish existing districts rests with the State governments.
- The Centre has no role to play in the alteration of districts or creation of new ones.
- This can either be done through an executive order or by passing a law in the State Assembly.

Q3. Farzad B gas field recently seen in news is in

- a. Qatar
- b. Tajikistan
- c. Iran
- d. Azerbaijan

Answer: c

Explanation:

Farzad B gas field is in the Farsi region which is located between the Iranian and Saudi territories.



Q4. Which of the following statements about Wholesale Price Index (WPI) is/are correct?

1. WPI-based inflation is used by the government in the preparation of fiscal, trade, and other economic policies.
2. Core inflation is the total inflation in an economy.
3. 2015-2016 is the base year for the Wholesale Price Index (WPI).

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- WPI-based inflation is used by the government in the preparation of fiscal, trade, and other economic policies.
- Headline inflation is the total inflation in the economy as it includes commodities such as food and energy prices, which tend to be much more volatile and prone to inflationary spikes.
- Core inflation excludes items frequently subject to volatile prices, like food and energy.
- 2011-2012 is the base year for the Wholesale Price Index (WPI).

**Q5. Consider the following statements regarding the Directive Principles of State Policy:
(UPSC 2015)**

1. The Principles spell out the socio-economic democracy in the country.
2. The provisions contained in these Principles are not enforceable by any court.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

Answer: c

Explanation:

- The **Directive Principles of State Policy** spell out the socio-economic democracy in the country.
- The provisions contained in the DPSPs are not enforceable by any court.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The casual resort by the police to the sedition clause continues to cause concern. Critically evaluate. (250 words; 15 marks)[GS-2, Polity and Governance]
2. During a discussion at the United Nations Security Council on the latest Israel-Palestine clashes, India as a nonpermanent member, reaffirmed its support for Palestine, but stopped short of making any direct reference to the status of Jerusalem or the future of Israel-Palestine borders. Does this indicate that India's Palestine policy is evolving? (250 words; 15 marks) [GS-2, International Relations].