

20 May 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: GEOGRAPHY

1. Storm likely in Bay of Bengal

Context:

The India Meteorological Department said that a low pressure area (a precursor to cyclonic storm) is likely to form in the eastern Bay of Bengal and the Northern Andaman Sea.

Details:

- The formation of the depression **comes close on the heels of Cyclone Tauktae**, which left a trail of destruction along the western coast.
 - **Cyclone Tauktae is the fourth cyclone** in consecutive years to develop in **cyclone shy Arabian Sea** in the pre-monsoon months.
 - Cyclone Nisarga (2020), Cyclone Vayu (2019) and Cyclone Mekanu (2018) are the other cyclones that have originated in the Arabian Sea in the recent past.
- **Storms are common in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea** in May, **ahead of the monsoon onset**.
- A weather system **draws on the heat and moisture to gain strength in the sea**.
- According to IMD, the **surface temperature of the Bay of Bengal is on the higher side** which would likely provide the ammunition the weather system needs **to turn into a cyclone**.
- If the cyclone takes shape, it will be called **Yaas**, a name given by **Oman**.

Why is the Bay of Bengal more prone to Cyclones?

- The **low-pressure system of cyclone needs a continuous supply of heat energy**. The **Bay of Bengal is warmer than the Arabian Sea**, and hence is able to provide the heat energy needed to sustain the low-pressure system.
- **Sea surface temperatures and humidity directly correlate with the chances of cyclone formation**.
 - The Bay of Bengal receives higher rainfall and constant inflow of fresh water from the Ganga and Brahmaputra rivers and the surface water keeps getting refreshed, making it impossible for the warm water to mix with the cooler water below. This condition is ideal for depression.
 - The Arabian Sea receives stronger winds that help dissipate the heat, and the lack of constant fresh water supply helps the warm water mix with the cool water, reducing the temperature.
- **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.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Putin, Xi hail ties at launch of work on nuclear plants in China

Context:

Russian President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping **launched the work on Russian-built nuclear power plants in China.**

Details:

- The work on pouring concrete into new units of the **Tianwan and Xudabao nuclear power plants** was initiated.
- **Tianwan nuclear power plant** was built in China, jointly with Russia and has been **operating since 2007.**
- **Xudabao station** is still **under construction.**
- According to the Russian President, units will be functional by 2026-2028 and that Russia and China are prepared to further develop nuclear power plants through joint construction.
- The Chinese President called **nuclear energy** a “**strategic priority for cooperation**” between the **two countries.**

2. U.S. to waive sanctions on firm behind Russia’s Nord Stream 2

Context:

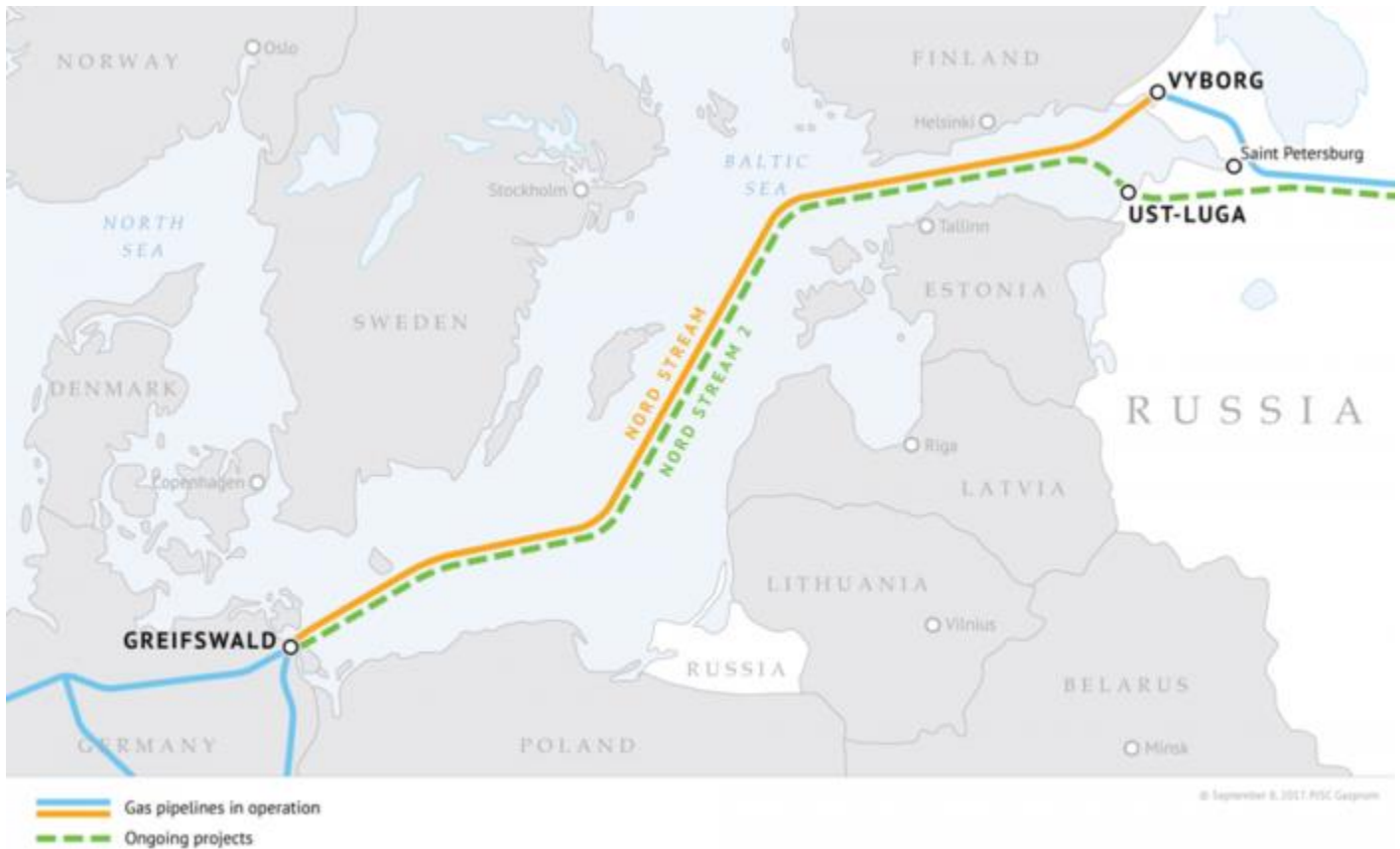
The U.S. government is **considering waiving sanctions** on the company behind **Russia’s Nord Stream 2 pipeline to Europe.**

Details:

- It is believed that the **administration under President Joe Biden** still opposed the Nord Stream 2 pipeline but felt it was important to **send a signal about its commitment to ties with Germany**, which were badly damaged under former President Donald Trump.

Nord Stream 2 System:

- The under-construction pipeline **will run along the already-completed Nord Stream 1 system**, and the **two together will supply an aggregate of 110 billion cubic metres of gas to Germany per year.**
- The pipeline falls in **German and Danish territory.**
- This would take the **Russian gas to Europe via Germany, under the Baltic Sea.**



Why is the Pipeline Controversial?

- Since it was first planned, Nord Stream 2 has **drawn criticism from the US**.
- The US believes that the **project would increase Europe's dependence on Russia for natural gas**, thus boldening its President Vladimir Putin.
 - Currently, **EU countries already rely on Russia for 40% of their gas needs**.
- Ukraine also has issues with the project.
 - Relations between Ukraine and Russia have seriously deteriorated in the aftermath of the Crimean conflict in 2014.
 - There is an existing land pipeline between Russia and Europe that runs through Ukraine, which feels that **once Nord Storm 2 is completed, Russia could bypass the Ukrainian pipeline, and deprive the country of lucrative transit fees**.

Category: HEALTH

1. Rajasthan govt. declares mucormycosis an epidemic

Context:

Amid the increasing instances of **mucormycosis (black fungus)**, the **Rajasthan government** has **declared it an epidemic and a notifiable disease**.

Details:

- At present, the State has more than 100 black fungus patients.
- It will be **mandatory for the health facilities to report every case of the disease in the State.**
- The declaration of mucormycosis as an epidemic would ensure its “integrated and coordinated” treatment along with the treatment for COVID-19.
- The notification was issued under **the Rajasthan Epidemic Act, 2020.**

Mucormycosis:

- Mucormycosis or black fungus is **primarily affecting people recovering from COVID-19.**
- It is a **complication caused by a fungal infection.**
- Mucormycosis **affects the sinuses, brain, and lungs, and is life-threatening.**

Read more on [Mucormycosis \[Black Fungus\]](#)

What is an Epidemic?

- The epidemic is a term that is often broadly used to describe a **problem that has grown out of control.** It occurs **when a disease spreads rapidly to several people** within a country or location.
- Epidemics are **generally highly communicable diseases** that spread through the population in a very short time.
- These **diseases could be viral, bacterial or other health events such as obesity.**

Note:

Telangana has also declared the “black fungus” spreading in its hospitals an **epidemic.**

C. GS 3 Related

Category: **ECONOMY**

1. Centre raises subsidy on DAP fertilizers; no hike for farmers

Context:

Following a review meeting on fertilizer prices chaired by Prime Minister, the Central government has **enhanced the subsidy on di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) fertilizers.**

Details:

- The PM stressed that **farmers should get fertilizers at old rates despite the international rise in prices.**
- The latest move comes in order to **retain the selling price for farmers at the current level of ₹1,200 per bag.**

Note:

- Fertilisers supply one or more plant nutrients essential to the growth of plants.
- Diammonium phosphate (DAP) is the **main source of Phosphorous.**

- **Essential plant nutrients** based on the amounts of nutrients that are required by plants are distinguished as **macronutrients and micronutrients**.
- **Phosphorus is a macronutrient**.
- Other frequently used fertilizers are **muriate of potash (MOP) and Urea**.

Read more on [NBS – Nutrient Based Subsidy Scheme](#)

Category: SECURITY

1. Scrap new privacy policy, Centre tells WhatsApp

Context:

The government of India sent a **notice to WhatsApp** asking it to **withdraw the controversial update to its privacy policy**.

Details:

- The MeitY notice **directs WhatsApp to withdraw its Privacy Policy 2021** as the changes and the manner of introducing these changes **undermine the sacrosanct values of informational privacy, data security and user choice for Indian users and harms the rights and interests of Indian citizens**.
- The Ministry highlighted how the new policy violated several provisions of Indian laws.
- The notice warned the firm that the **failure to give a satisfactory response** may result in **steps in consonance with law**.

This issue has been covered in the [20th March 2021 Comprehensive News Analysis](#).

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Interpretations which impede a just social order

Context:

- A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court has declared the **Maharashtra State Reservation for Socially and Educationally Backward Classes (SEBC) Act** of 2018 as being unconstitutional.

For more information on this refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 6th May 2021](#)

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 9th May 2021](#)

Details:

- The judgement is based on the following three primary findings of the bench.

- The Court held that the Maratha community did not constitute a socially and educationally backward class.
- The law concerned was in breach of the rule set by the Supreme Court in the **Indra Sawhney vs Union of India (1992) judgement** which disallows reservations made in excess of 50% of the total available positions.
- The Court noted that **State governments had no independent power to declare a group as a backward class** based on its interpretation of the **102nd constitutional amendment**.

Concerns:

- The article expresses deep concerns over the judgement, especially with regard to the observations regarding the limit on reservations and the states' power to determine backward classes.

With regard to limit on reservation:

No constitutional backing:

- The text of **Articles 16(4) and 15(4)** which confer power on the government to make reservations for the deserving classes contains no limitation on reservation.
- Hence, the idea that **reservations ought to be restricted to 50%** does not stem from the Constitution but from the Supreme Court Judgement in the Indra Sawhney vs Union of India (1992) case. Hence the limit does not have constitutional backing.

Against the objective of attaining substantive equality:

- **Reservation is an important tool to obtain the objective of substantive equality as envisioned in the Indian Constitution.** It could impede the ability of States to secure a **just social order**.

With regard to states' power in determining backward classes:

Impede the right of certain communities:

- Until now, the central government and each of the State governments produced separate lists declaring communities as socially and educationally backward. As a result, backward communities that were kept out of the central list were entitled to reservation at least for those posts and seats under the control of the State government.
- The recent judgement stating that the state governments cannot exercise the right of classifying communities as backward may lead to a scenario where **deserving communities might lose the benefits offered by reservation**.

Interpretational errors:

- The bench seems to have overlooked, at least, two essential factors in its observation on the 102nd Amendment and its impact on the states' right to determine backward classes.
 - Article 342A clearly mentions the term "Central List" differentiating itself from the existent state lists. Thus the provision in question was intended towards the categorisation of groups as backward for the purposes of reservation to posts and seats under the Union government's control only. The SC's observation thus seems like impinging on the **plain meaning of the term "central list"**.

- The Union Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment during the **parliamentary debate on the constitutional amendment bill** had reiterated that the changes envisaged via the 102nd Amendment did not intend to limit the powers of states in any way.

Against the principle of federalism:

- The Constitutional Bench's interpretation of the 102nd Amendment dispossessing the states from exercising the power to determine backward classes goes against the very essence of federalism, which again is a **basic structure of the Indian Constitution**.

Conclusion:

- **The interpretation of the 102nd Amendment seems to be against values of equality and federalism**, considered integral aspects of India's democracy.
- The Union Government has rightly filed a petition to review the judgment with respect to the limits it places on the power of State governments to determine backward classes. If the Supreme Court refuses the plea, the Parliament can amend the Constitution and grant to States the power to determine backwardness.

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. A collage of laws that leaves the worker out in the cold

Background:

Social Security Code 2020:

- India's Parliament in September 2020 passed a Social Security Code.
- The Social Security Code 2020 merges existing social security laws. It **amalgamates and rationalizes the provisions of eight existing central labour laws**.
- The code attempts to **include informal workers** within the ambit of social security administration.

This topic has been discussed in detail in the following article:

[Code on Social Security](#)

Impact of the pandemic on the informal workers:

- The COVID-19 pandemic has destroyed the lives and livelihoods of millions in India, more so for the low-paid, **informal workers, who constitute 91% of the workforce**. The **loss of jobs and income cuts have pushed this vulnerable section further into debt and poverty**.
- In such a scenario, the lack of a comprehensive social security cover for the informal workers is a major concern.
 - Despite existing social security schemes run by State governments under the **Unorganized Workers' Social Security Act, 2008**, still, a large number of informal workers are outside the ambit of any social security even after 13 years.

Concerns associated with the new Social Security code:

- The article, analyzing the effectiveness of the new social security code in ensuring the much needed social security for the needy, notes that **the code fails to ensure universalization of social security.**

Exclusion of certain benefits for unorganized workers:

- Even under the new code, **employees provident fund, employees state insurance (ESI), maternity benefit, gratuity continue to be entirely for organised sector workers.**

Hurdles for informal workers:

- The **lack of awareness among informal workers** regarding social security schemes is a critical impediment in the universalization of social security.
- The legal framework as proposed in the Code and Rules requires the informal workers to register as beneficiaries to receive social security benefits. The informal worker will have to **register on the specified online portal** to be developed by the central government. This could act as a major impediment for the workers.
 - Online registration poses a significant challenge as most informal workers **lack digital literacy and connectivity.**
 - Informal workers also **find it difficult to furnish documentary papers** required as part of the registration process.
 - Given that most informal workers are footloose casual workers on the move from one place to another in search of livelihoods, they may find it difficult to provide address proof.
 - Given the absence of tangible employer-employee relations in informal employments, such workers may find it difficult to provide proof of livelihood and income details.
- Thus the requirement of registration may deter informal workers from completing the registration and they may continue to remain outside the social security ambit.

Lack of concrete measures:

- The code proposes that both the central and state governments will formulate schemes for unorganised workers as and when they deem fit. The **absence of definite and unambiguous provisions** in the present code would further complicate the achievement of universal registration.

Lack of an integrated structure:

- Despite the **footloose nature of unorganised workers**, the code does not provide for inter-state arrangement and cooperation. Without an integrated structure, the implications of this code would be too varied across states to be administered and would render the whole process to become complicated and ineffective.
- Previous attempts at providing holistic social security cover for the unorganised workforce in a simple and effective manner have been lost in the **Centre-State labyrinth and jurisdictional or institutional overlap.**

Lack of an all inclusive approach:

- The code fails to imbibe an all inclusive approach by continuing to **adopt a labour market classification based social security benefit programmes.**
- It fails to consider the unorganized workforce as one unit.

Thresholds of the number of workers employed:

- Key benefits like maternity benefit, employees provident fund and gratuity continue to be available for workers in those establishments that have employees above a certain threshold.
- Hence these critical provisions have **not been made universal and continue to remain inaccessible for a vast majority of informal workers.**
- Also such clauses **disincentive the employers to formalize the existing workforce**, thus depriving the economy of the benefits of formalization.

Conclusion:

- The universalization of social security remains an unfulfilled aspiration in the new code on social security.
- There is an urgent need to recognise that **India is ageing without social security**, and the demographic dividend of the young workforce that could support the ageing ends in 15 years.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. A thaw in India-Pakistan trade relations?

Context:

- The rejection by the Pakistan government of the recent proposal made to it by the Pakistani Economic Coordination Committee (ECC) to import sugar, cotton and cotton yarn from India.

Background:

Restriction in bilateral trade:

- In 2019, India and Pakistan undertook trade-restrictive measures against each other.
 - After the Pulwama terror attack, **India withdrew the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status of Pakistan and imposed a customs duty hike of 200% on imports.**
 - When India revoked the autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir, **Pakistan suspended bilateral trade with India.**

Details:

- Despite the disappointment with the Pakistan decision, the article expresses a **possibility of resumption of trade relations** between the two countries in the coming times based on the following reasons.

History of ups and downs:

- Even though trade curbs have been applied several times in the past, such measures have been reversed to create a trade enhancing environment when the relations stabilized.

- There have been growing indications of back channel talks between the two neighbours and the recent developments like the extension of the ceasefire agreement between the two nations are indicative of a **thaw in their otherwise troubled and strained relationship**.

For more information on this development refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 12th April 2021](#)

Pressure of the pandemic:

- The Pakistan government had lifted the trade ban on the **import of medicines** and raw material from India to avert a health crisis.
- Now there is a demand for the inclusion of more items like sugar, cotton and yarn. These are critical not just for domestic consumption but also for the **domestic industries which have had to face the wrath of the pandemic**.

Continued trade despite restrictions:

- The available data indicate that there has been substantial **trade between the two countries in the recent past**.
 - During 2020-21 (April-February), the recorded bilateral trade was \$280 million, of which India's exports to Pakistan were \$278 million and imports were \$2 million with even banned items like sugar being exported to Pakistan.
 - A sizeable number of items have been traded between the two countries. This is despite the complete ban on trade by Pakistan on both exports and imports.
- Thus, even under restrictive trade conditions, there has been unimpeded trade between the two countries.
 - **Informal channels for trade** have functioned for decades and are a ready option for traders from both countries.

Significance of bilateral trade:

- The trade in essential agricultural commodities could **help stabilise domestic prices and take care of seasonal shortages and food security in the home country**.
- A robust bilateral trade augurs well for several important **domestic and export industries** in both countries.
- There are **significant costs of non-cooperation** on the economic front. Given the interdependencies between India and Pakistan, restrictions on trade only shift trade to informal channels. The informal channels cost more and are not dependable.
- The **increased trade relation and economic interdependence could also play a critical role in easing the strained bilateral relation**.

Conclusion:

- Given the potential benefits of a robust trade relation, India and Pakistan must initiate a **process for a gradual deepening of the bilateral trade**. This could begin with a positive list for trade, which has to be expanded over the years to move towards complete normalisation.

- **Business organisations and chambers of commerce should play an important role** in creating a strong lobby that could help revive the trade dialogue between the two nations.

F. Prelims Facts

1. 6 UNESCO heritage sites added in India

What's in News?

Six sites have been added to India's tentative list of UNESCO world heritage sites.

- Six of the nine sites **submitted by the [Archaeological Survey of India](#)** had been **accepted by UNESCO for inclusion in the tentative list.**
 - This is a requirement before the final nomination of any site.
- The sites include the **Ganga ghats in Varanasi, temples of Kancheepuram** and the **Satpura Tiger Reserve** in Madhya Pradesh, **Maratha military architecture** in Maharashtra, the **Hire Benakal megalithic site** in Karnataka and **Bhedaghat-Lametaghat** of Narmada Valley.
 - With the addition of these six sites, UNESCO has 48 proposals in the tentative list of India.

Note:

- UNESCO has already added **30 of India's cultural sites, 7 natural, and 1 mixed site** in its World Heritage List.
- **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** is the nodal department for forwarding the proposals to UNESCO.

Read more on: [UNESCO World Heritage Sites in India](#)

G. Tidbits

1. China protests U.S. Navy passage via Taiwan Strait

What's in News?

China protested the latest passage by a U.S. Navy ship through the Taiwan Strait, calling it a provocation that undermined peace and stability in the region.

- According to the US navy, its guided missile destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur conducted a routine Taiwan Strait transit in accordance with international law.
- It asserted that the passage demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Note:

While the Taiwan strait is in international waters, China claims self-governing Taiwan as its own territory and regards the U.S. Navy's presence in the area as a show of support for the island's democratic government.



H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the following has/have been accorded the Geographical Indication (GI) tag?

1. Suvarnarekha mango
2. Banganapalli mango
3. Gholvad Sapota

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- Gholvad Sapota from Maharashtra, Suvarnarekha mango and Banganapalli mango from Andhra Pradesh have all been accorded the Geographical Indication Tag.

Q2. With reference to President's Rule, which of the following statements is/are correct?

1. A proclamation imposing President's Rule must be approved by both the Houses of Parliament within three months from the date of its issue.
2. A law made by the Parliament or president or any other specified authority continues to be operative even after the President's Rule.
3. Chhattisgarh and Telangana are the only Indian states that have never slipped to President's rule.

Options:

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. None
- d. 2 only

Answer: b

Explanation:

- A proclamation imposing President's Rule must be approved by both the Houses of Parliament within two months from the date of its issue.
- If approved by both the Houses of Parliament, the President's rule continues for six months.
- A law made by the Parliament or president or any other specified authority continues to be operative even after the President's Rule.
- This means that the period for which such a law remains in force is not co-terminus with the duration of the proclamation. But it can be repealed or altered or re-enacted by the state legislature.
- Chhattisgarh and Telangana are the only Indian states that have never slipped to President's rule.

Q3. Consider the following statements about National Human Rights Commission (NHRC):

1. A person who has been Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, or a Judge of the Supreme Court can be the chairperson of the NHRC.
2. The chairperson and members of the NHRC will hold office for five years or till the age of seventy years.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- A person who has been Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, or a Judge of the Supreme Court can be the chairperson of the NHRC.
- The Protection of Human Rights (Amendment) Act, 2019 reduced the tenure of the Chairperson and members of NHRC to three years (earlier five years) or till the age of seventy years.

Q4. Which of the following statements about Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is/are correct?

1. The CBI functions under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
2. With the nationalisation of the banks in 1969, the Public Sector Banks and their employees also came within the ambit of the CBI.

Options:

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) is the premier investigating agency of India.
- It operates under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.
- It is not a statutory body. It derives its powers from the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act, 1946.
- With the nationalisation of the banks in 1969, the Public Sector Banks and their employees also came within the ambit of the CBI.

Q5. With reference to the cultural history of medieval India, consider the following statements: (UPSC 2016)

1. Siddhas (Sittars) of Tamil region were monotheistic and condemned idolatry.
2. Lingayats of Kannada region questioned the theory of rebirth and rejected the caste hierarchy.

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 Tamil Siddhas are a religious order of mystics (liberated yogis) found in the southern part of India.
- They were monotheistic and condemned idolatry, as they believed in Nirakara or formless god.
- Lingayats are the followers of the 12th-century philosopher and poet Basavanna.
- Lingayats of the Kannada region questioned the theory of rebirth and rejected the caste hierarchy.
- They challenged the idea of caste and the “pollution” attributed to certain groups by Brahmanas.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The universalisation of social security remains an unfulfilled aspiration in the new code on social security. Examine the statement. (250 words; 15 marks) [GS-2, Polity and Governance].
2. Is a thaw in the India-Pakistan trade relations possible in the current context? Discuss. (250 words; 15 marks) [GS-2, International Relations].

