

25 May 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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A. GS 1 Related

Category: SOCIAL ISSUES

1. Provide food, rations to stranded workers: SC

Context:

- A two judge bench of the Supreme Court is hearing a case on **the plight of the migrant labourer families during the second wave of the pandemic.**

Background:

- The lockdowns in several states have left many migrant workers **unemployed.**
- The loss of jobs and incomes has **pushed a large proportion of the population into poverty and nutritional insecurity.**

Details:

- Noting the difficulties being faced by the migrant labour population, the bench has emphasized the need for immediate government support for the stranded migrant labourer families.
- It has directed the concerned authorities to undertake the **distribution of dry rations and cooked food** and also explore the proposals to provide life support for migrant workers.

Important observations of the bench:

Lack of national database on migrant workers:

- The Court lamented the **inordinate delay in completing a national database to identify and register migrant workers.**
- Such a database would make it easier for the government to identify and provide essential support and benefits to the migrant workers under its different schemes. The lack of proper registration and identity cards would render the implementation of welfare schemes difficult on the ground level.
- The bench impressed upon the Central government and the State Governments to complete the process of registration of organised workers as early as possible.
- The court noted that the immediate handing out of dry rations and cooked food during the second wave should not depend on the completion of registration of workers and the database.

Need to ensure inclusion of even those without ration cards:

- Noting that the **central government's Atmanirbhar scheme** ensured providing of dry rations only to migrant workers covered under the Food Security Act, that is, people with ration cards, the court observed that the unorganised labourers, wandering from one place of work to another in mega cities, could not be expected to have ration cards.
- In this direction, the SC has asked the States to file affidavits indicating the mechanism by which the states plan to **distribute dry ration to migrant workers who do not possess a ration card.**
- The Bench directed that **"wide publicity" should be given to welfare schemes** for migrant workers, including locations of community kitchens, so that needy persons would benefit.

Cash transfers:

- Despite the potential advantage of a direct cash transfer to the migrant labourers, the court refused to entertain the plea to direct States to provide direct cash transfers to migrant workers, saying this was a **matter of policy concerning individual States or UTs**.
 - Direct cash transfers would allow the destitute workers to purchase essentials.
 - Given that such money would generate demand in the economy, it is bound to help in economic revival as well.

B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Won't limit functions till new data law: WhatsApp

Context:

- Facebook-owned WhatsApp has told the government that it will not limit functionality for users and will only continue reminding the users about the **privacy policy update** until the **Personal Data Protection law** comes into effect.

Background:

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

For more information on this issue, refer to:

[Rollback Privacy Policy – Govt. to Whatsapp: RSTV- Big Picture](#)

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ECONOMY

1. 'GST Council should prioritise COVID relief, States' cash woes'

Context:

- Ahead of the **scheduled Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council meeting**, the article discusses some of the major topics that would find detailed discussions during the meeting.

Details:

Tax relief:

- The council should consider **reducing the tax rates or zero-rating the GST on essential materials** to combat COVID like vaccines, medicines, hand sanitizers, oximeters and oxygen concentrators.
- The council should also consider providing **input tax credits to companies that have been importing critical medical items**.

Rationalizing GST rates:

- The council should **rationalise GST rates to provide relief to sectors like entertainment, hotels and tourism** that are worst hit by the second wave.
- The council should consider **reducing the GST rate for composition dealers**.
- COVID-related expenditures incurred by employers for the welfare of employees and their families like vaccination drives and distribution of oxygen concentrators may also be considered as an input tax credit.

Ensuring faster refunds:

- The industries must be enabled to **get their due refunds quicker to free up their working capital needs**. This will infuse the necessary liquidity into their finances.
- GST refunds for several exporters including gems and jewellery and IT sectors are stuck. The gems and jewellery industry has over ₹1,000 crore stuck in past accumulated input tax credits and due to backlog in refunds.

GST compensation to states:

- Given that the last GST meeting had ended without a consensus on the **Centre's GST compensation formula**, a new mechanism for paying States their compensation dues must be designed.
- States are still owed Rs. 63,000 crore from last year's dues and GST cess collections are unlikely to meet this year's compensation dues as well, following the spate of lockdowns across several States.

For more information on this issue refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 11th August 2020](#)

2. FDI flows crossed \$81 bn in FY21

Context:

- **Data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry** relating to foreign investment into India.

Details:

Impressive growth in foreign investment:

- **Foreign direct investment (FDI)** flows into India grew 10% in 2020-21 to touch a record \$81.72 billion. The FDI equity inflows have risen 19% to total almost \$60 billion.

Top investors:

- **Singapore** has emerged as the top investor followed by the U.S. and Mauritius.
- FDI equity flows from the U.S., the U.K. and Saudi Arabia have witnessed sharp increases.

Top destination states:

- **Gujarat** was the top FDI destination followed by Maharashtra and Karnataka.

- The other regions have accounted for a disproportionately lower amount of 23% of the remaining foreign equity capital. This is indicative of the **skewed pattern of FDI inflows and concerns of unbalanced growth**.

Top sectors:

- **Computer software and hardware** has emerged as the top sector during 2020-21 with about 44% share of the total FDI equity inflow followed by construction (infrastructure) activities and services sector.
- Construction (infrastructure) activities, computer software and hardware, rubber goods, retail trading, drugs and pharmaceuticals and electrical equipment have recorded more than a 100% jump in equity during 2020-21.

Category: DISASTER MANAGEMENT

1. Odisha, Bengal grapple with evacuation ahead of cyclone

Context:

- Evacuation from the coastal districts of Odisha and West Bengal ahead of the **landfall of cyclone Yaas**.

Details:

- Cyclone Yaas is likely to make **landfall on the north Odisha-West Bengal coast between the Paradip Coast in Odisha and Sagar Island in West Bengal**, close to Balasore in Odisha.
- Along with heavy rain, the Indian Meteorological Department has issued a **storm surge warning**.
- Given the likelihood of it being a very severe cyclonic storm with wind speeds at the time of landfall likely to be about 155 to 165 kmph, **large scale evacuation from coastal and low lying areas is being undertaken**.
- West Bengal alone is in the process of evacuating about 10 lakh people to cyclone shelters.

For more information on this topic refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 23rd March 2021](#)

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. A September exit, Afghanistan at the crossroads

Background:

- The U.S. has begun its withdrawal of the armed forces from Afghanistan.

For more information on this issue refer to:

UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 2nd May 2021

Details:

- The article argues that while the U.S.'s withdrawal will end its war in Afghanistan, **peace in Afghanistan will remain uncertain and will depend on what steps major stakeholders take.**

Stalemate in the Afghan Peace process:

- The **Afghanistan peace process has been in disarray.**
 - The U.S. peace plan involves the dissolution of the current government and setting up of a new governing system that would include the **Taliban**. Such a government would decide the future distribution of power and changes to the Afghan Constitution. This proposal has not been accepted by Afghanistan President Mr. Ghani who has refused to step down for an interim regime to take over.
 - The **division between the various factions in Afghanistan** has only deepened over time.
 - **The Taliban has indulged in deadly attacks** on targets in different provinces. It has indulged in arbitrary acts of violence just to demonstrate its capability. Given the rising level of violence in Afghanistan, the prospects of negotiating peace in Afghanistan seem bleak.
 - There seems to be a difference of opinion between the field commanders and the Taliban leadership on the negotiations.
 - The **United Nations conference on the Afghan peace process scheduled in Istanbul**, Turkey remains suspended due to the reluctance of the Taliban.
 - The **U.S. administration is insistent on withdrawing its troops** even without any power-sharing deal between the warring parties in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's stakes:

- Being the Taliban's chief patron, Pakistan is the most important player in the Afghan conflict.
- The U.S. military presence in Afghanistan had kept Washington reliant on Rawalpindi for operational and other support. **Pakistan was able to leverage this for its strategic goals vis-a-vis India.** With the U.S. withdrawal, Pakistan faces an uphill task in conducting a viable Afghan policy. Pakistan – U.S. bilateral relations will depend upon Pakistan's role in ensuring a smooth transition of power in Kabul.
- **Kabul government's relation with Pakistan continues to be characterised by deep hostility and mistrust.** Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani has accused Pakistan of running "an organized system of support" for the Afghan Taliban.
- A potential civil war-like scenario in Afghanistan will not augur well for Pakistan given that it will lead to **unconstrained refugee flows** and terror attacks inside its territory.

China's stakes:

- Though China wants the Taliban to moderate its position, it continues to support the Taliban for strategic reasons.

- Despite public rhetoric of asking the U.S. to leave, the U.S.'s military presence in Afghanistan had helped suppress many **terrorist groups which threaten China directly or Beijing-friendly regimes in Central Asia**.
- The U.S. withdrawal has serious implications for China as it would leave China vulnerable to its **spillover effects, particularly in the restive Xinjiang province**.

India's stake:

- India has been the key regional backer of the Ghani government, supporting an "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned and Afghan-controlled" peace process.
- India **fears a Taliban-dominated regime in Kabul** might allow Pakistan to dictate Afghanistan's India policy which could turn out to be detrimental to India's strategic interests.
- Despite considerable stakes, **India continues to be a peripheral player in the ongoing negotiations**, partly attributable to India's reluctance to engage in talks with the Taliban.
- Given the lack of leverage with the Taliban and the recent events projecting a most likely scenario of the Taliban taking over power, the article argues for India to explore the possibility of developing links with the amenable section of the Afghan Taliban.
- The reduction in tensions between India and Pakistan will have an indirect stabilising effect on Afghanistan.

For more information on this issue refer to:

[Afghan Peace Process and India: RSTV – India's World](#)

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Expanding the scope of POCSO

Context:

- The article argues for expanding the scope of the POCSO Act to enable prosecution of historical child sexual abuse.

Details:

- While the **Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act (POCSO)** has been a step in the right direction to protect children from offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography, the POCSO Act has several deficiencies which need to be addressed to make it truly effective.
- A fundamental defect of POCSO is its **inability to deal with historical cases of child abuse**.
 - Historical child sexual abuse refers to incidents that are reported late.

Significance of including historical cases:

- The step to include prosecution of historical cases of child sexual abuse would be in line with the **growing international jurisprudence** around this issue.
- It would also help uphold the provisions of the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

Concerns:

Contrary to established legal principles:

- The proposal seems to run counter to the **established principle of criminal law that requires an act of crime to be reported at the earliest.**
- Any delay in filing the complaint dilutes the efficacy of the prosecution's case.

Counter arguments:

- The circumstances around child sexual abuse cannot and must not be viewed in the same manner as other criminal offences.

Lack of understanding at the age:

- In the case of child sexual abuse, it is difficult for the child to report the offence or offender at the earliest point in time.
- It requires time and support for the child to recognise and comprehend the gravity of what transpired to report the offence.

Impeding factors:

- **Intra-familial abuse accounts for a large proportion of child abuse cases.**
- The delays in reporting sexual abuse may be due to factors such as **threats from the perpetrator, fear of public humiliation, and absence of trustworthy confidant for the child.**
- Sometimes a child keeps the abuse a secret because of the fear that no one will believe the abuse, which leads to accommodative behaviour on the part of the child.

Challenges in implementation:

Legal provisions:

- **Provisions in the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) prohibit judicial magistrates from taking cognisance of cases beyond a specific time period.** Reporting of an offence, under Section 354 of the IPC, more than three years after the date of the incident would be barred by the CrPC. Given such provisions, the **historical reporting of child sexual offences would be legally implausible.**

Availability of evidence:

- One of the major drawbacks of delayed reporting would be the lack of evidence to advance prosecution. There are **very few chances for gathering direct physical and medical evidence in such cases.**

Recommendations:

Changes in POCSO law:

- With growing research and empirical evidence pointing to behaviour justifying delayed reporting, there is a need to amend the law to allow delayed reporting and prosecution with regard to incidents of child sexual offences.
- India must **revise its legal and procedural methods to deal with historical child sexual abuse.**

For cases before 2012:

- The Union Ministry of Law and Justice's clarification that no time limit shall apply for POCSO cases is a welcome step and would help strengthen the POCSO jurisprudence, however, it does not help in cases that deal with incidents before 2012.
- Hence the Union government must **also frame guidelines to direct effective and purposeful prosecution in cases that are not covered by the POCSO.**

F. Prelims Facts

1. High-powered panel meets to choose next CBI Director

- The CBI director is selected by a **committee comprising the Chief Justice of India, the Prime Minister of India and the leader of the largest Opposition Party in the Lok Sabha.**

2. Colourful Skies

Sun halo:

- It is basically a rainbow around the Sun.
- This occurs due to the **dispersion of light**, as white light passes through ice crystals found in upper-level cirrus clouds, causing the halo to have colours.
- Light undergoes **two refractions as it passes through the ice crystals** and the bending that occurs depends on the ice crystal's diameter.

Context:

- **Bengaluru witnessed a rare phenomenon known as sun halo.**
- The halo that appeared around the Sun is a 22-degree ring. The 22-degree sun halo belongs to the family of ice-crystal halos.

G. Tidbits

1. '90%-95% of mucormycosis patients are diabetics on steroids'

- In the light of the increasing number of Mucormycosis cases being reported, the Director of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences speaking at the Health Ministry press conference has stated that **Mucormycosis is not a communicable disease and 90%-95% of patients are mostly diabetics who were on steroids.**
- In general, there are various types of fungal infections such as candida, aspergillosis, cryptococcus, histoplasmosis and coccidioidomycosis. **Mucormycosis, candida and aspergillosis** are the ones observed more in those with low immunity.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the given statements is/are correct w.r.t the GST Council?

1. The Chairperson of the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) is a permanent invitee to all proceedings of the GST Council and has one vote.
2. Each state has one vote, irrespective of its size or population.
3. Half of the total number of Members of the Council constitutes the quorum at its meetings.

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- Chairperson of the Central Board of Excise and Customs (CBEC) is a non-voting permanent invitee to all proceedings of the GST Council.
- Each state has one vote, irrespective of its size or population.
- In the GST Council meetings, half of the total number of Members of the Council constitutes the quorum.

Q2. Which of the following can help in Carbon Sequestration?

1. Dumping of Iron in the upper ocean
2. Crop Rotation
3. Deep sea fishing

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Dumping of Iron in the upper ocean leads to phytoplankton bloom which is known as Iron Fertilization. The phytoplankton uses carbon dioxide in the air and converts it to carbohydrates. This helps in carbon sequestration.
- The organic content in the soil increases due to crop rotation fostering carbon sequestration.

- The animal and plant material deposited in deep sea are a part of the ocean food web. The carbon thus sequestered in the deep sea is removed during deep sea fishing. This does not facilitate carbon sequestration.

Q3. The search committee involved in making recommendation for the appointment of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) director comprises:

1. Chief Justice of India
2. Leader of Opposition/Leader of the largest opposition party
3. Central Vigilance Commissioner
4. Home Secretary
5. Prime Minister

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- CBI Director is appointed as per the Lokpal Act.
- The search committee that recommends the name of CBI director to be appointed, to the centre comprises the Prime Minister as the chairperson, the Chief Justice of India and the Leader of Opposition.
 - In the absence of the Leader of Opposition, the Leader of the largest opposition party.

Q4. Which of the following is/are fungal infections?

1. Mucormycosis
2. Cryptococcus
3. Histoplasmosis
4. Candida

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

Mucormycosis, candida, aspergillosis, cryptococcus, histoplasmosis and coccidioidomycosis are all fungal infections.

Read more on [Mucormycosis](#).

Q5. Consider the following statements: (UPSC 2017)

1. In tropical regions, Zika virus disease is transmitted by the same mosquito that transmits dengue.
2. Sexual transmission of Zika virus disease is possible.

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:

- In tropical regions, Zika virus disease is transmitted by the Aedes aegypti mosquito – the same mosquito that transmits dengue, yellow fever and chikungunya.
- Zika virus is also transmitted through sexual contact, transfusion of blood, during organ transplantation and from mother to foetus during pregnancy.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act has to be suitably expanded to account for the reporting of historical child sexual abuse. Analyse. (10 Marks, 150 Words) [GS-2, Governance]
2. The unconditional withdrawal of all US troops from Afghanistan could push China to the centre stage and negatively impact the future of Afghanistan. Discuss. (15 Marks, 250 Words) [GS-2, International Relations]