

30 May 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Withdraw transfer order of Chief Secy., Mamata tells Centre

Context:

Following the absence of the West Bengal Chief Minister at the review meeting on Cyclone Yaas with the Prime Minister, the **appointments committee of the Union Cabinet** attached the **State's Chief Secretary- to the Centre**.

- West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has **urged the Centre to withdraw the order**.

What is the rule cited by DoPT ?

- The DoPT order said that the ACC has approved the transfer to Delhi under Rule 6(I) of the IAS (cadre) Rules, 1954.
- The said rule pertains to deputation of cadre officers.
- This issue has been covered in [UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis. May 29th, 2021 CNA.](#)**

What has been the practice so far?

- Before any officer of All India Services (AIS) is called for deputation to the Centre, **his or her concurrence is required**.
- The **Establishment Officer** in DoPT **invites nominations from State governments**.
- Once the nomination is received, their eligibility is scrutinised by a panel and then an offer list is prepared, traditionally done with the State government on board.
- Central Ministries and offices can then choose from the list of officers on offer.
- AIS officers are recruited by the Centre and they are lent to States.

What if the officer refuses to comply with the order?

- The All India Services (Discipline and Appeal) Rules, 1969 are not clear on the punishment in such cases.
- But Rule 7 says the authority to institute proceedings and to impose penalty will be the State government while he or she was serving in connection with the affairs of a State.

The present case is peculiar as the IAS officer is set to retire on May 31, 2021 and is not on deputation to the Central government. The **Chief Minister can write to the Centre to reconsider its decision**.

2. ₹10 lakh corpus fund for every child orphaned by COVID-19

Context:

The Union government has announced a special **“PM-CARES for Children” scheme** for all those orphaned due to COVID-19.

Details:

- **Children who have lost both parents or the lone surviving parent or their legal guardian or adoptive parent due to COVID-19** will be supported under the scheme.

Monetary Support:

- It will include a corpus of **₹10 lakh for each child till he or she reaches the age of 18.**
 - When a child turns 18, he/she will draw a **monthly stipend from the corpus** of ₹10 lakh in order to meet expenses for personal needs and higher education.
 - On reaching the age of 23, the **child will get the entire ₹10 lakh.**

Schooling:

- The government will also assist such children with school education.
 - They will be given **admission in the nearest Kendriya Vidyalaya or in a private school as a day scholar.**
- If the child is admitted in a private school, the **fees will be paid from the PM CARES Fund** as per norms under the Right To Education Act, 2009.
- PM CARES will also meet the expenses on uniform, text-books and notebooks.
- Children in the age group of 11-18 will have the **option to study in a residential school** under the Central government such as **Sainik School and Navodaya Vidyalaya.**

Health:

- All children will be enrolled as a **beneficiary under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme** with a **health insurance cover of ₹5 lakh**, where the **premium amount will be paid by PM CARES** till a child turns 18.

Note:

- The government has also announced measures to help the families who have lost the sole earning member due to COVID-19.
- Pension scheme of the Employees State Insurance Corporation is being extended.

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Philippines protests against China's 'illegal' South China Sea presence

Context:

The Philippines has protested China's continuing illegal presence and activities near an island in the South China Sea held by it.

- A diplomatic protest was launched by Philippines over the incessant deployment, prolonged presence, and illegal activities of Chinese maritime assets and fishing vessels in the vicinity of **Thitu island.**

- According to Philippines, the **Pag-asa** Islands is an integral part of the country over which it has sovereignty and jurisdiction.
 - **Thitu, known as Pag-asa** in the Philippines, is 451 km from the mainland and is one of the **biggest among the eight reefs, shoals and islands it occupies in the Spratly archipelago**.

Issue:

- Tensions between China and Philippines have escalated over the months-long **presence of hundreds of Chinese boats in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone**.
- The Philippines says it believes the vessels were manned by militia, while Beijing has said they were fishing boats sheltering from bad weather.
- This was at least the 84th diplomatic protest the Philippines has filed against China since President Rodrigo Duterte took office in 2016.
- An **international tribunal in 2016 invalidated China's expansive claim in the South China Sea**, where about \$3 trillion worth of ship-borne trade passes annually.
- Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam also have competing claims to various islands in the South China Sea.

Read more on [South China Sea Dispute – Countries Involved, Causes, Effects & Resolution](#)

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. Ripples from Yaas and surging tides devastate the Sunderbans

Context:

Every cyclone poses **new challenges to the Sunderbans and its inhabitants**.

Details:

- Over just the past three years, the Sunderbans has been **damaged by four tropical cyclones — Fani** (May 2019), **Bulbul** (November 2019), **Amphan** (May 2020) and **Yaas** (May 2021).
- With every cyclone, the region has suffered damage because of gale winds and breached embankments, leading to ingress of sea water.
 - The intensity of the gale winds has ranged from 100 kmph to 150 kmph during each of the cyclones.

Read more on Gale winds [UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis. May 17th, 2021 CNA.](#)

Effects of Cyclone Yaas:

- Cyclone Yaas made landfall about 200 km south of the Sunderbans in Odisha. But it **inundated large areas of the estuary**.
- There is a **scarcity of drinking water** because of inundation.

- The **combined effect** of the **full moon tide** and the **cyclone** led to the overflowing and breach of embankments in large areas of the Sunderbans.
- Not only the **western part of Sunderbans** that faces **Bay of Bengal** but large parts in the **eastern part of the delta** remain under water days after the cyclone and the high tide.
- Once the sea water enters the islands, the **crops are inundated** and **land cannot be cultivated because of the salinity**, even the **fish in the ponds die**.

Note:

- **Ghoramara** is one of the islands that has been sinking due to rising sea levels, where a few dozen houses and acres of land go under water every year.
- **Sagar Island**, the **biggest island of the Sundarbans chain** and site of the **famous Gangasagar Mela during Makar Sankranti**, has also suffered damage.

Way Forward:

- Solution to this perennial problem lies in **long-term planning**.
- Strategies that will **minimise the impact of climate change must be adopted**.
- Policy makers must prepare **disaster management plans suited to the region**.

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: HEALTH

1. Probing the origins of the SARS-CoV-2 virus

Context:

Calls to **investigate into the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic** have resurfaced.

Details:

- The novel coronavirus was first reported from Wuhan.
 - The Chinese city hosts a laboratory conducting virus research.
- The Program for Monitoring Emerging Diseases (ProMED) notified pneumonia of unknown cause in the city in December 2019.
 - The city's Huanan wet market was associated with many of the earliest cases.

What is the need for investigation into the origin?

According to a group of scientists, this is necessary because the two theories on the origins remain invalid. They are:

1. The virus could have been accidentally released from a laboratory.
2. It was the result of a spillover from some animal species to humans.

What have U.S. intelligence agencies been asked to do?

- Subsequent to the call issued by scientists, U.S. President Joe Biden, ordered an investigation by intelligence agencies into the origins of the virus.
- The Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) has also acknowledged that more work needs to be done on the lab leak theory.
 - Earlier, a WHO team that visited Wuhan thought a leak to be the least likely hypothesis.

Why has the demand for a fresh inquiry arisen?

- Understanding the origin of the virus is important to both increase safety in laboratories undertaking biological research, and to prevent pandemics of animal origin.

What is the basis for the natural origin hypothesis?

- The natural origin hypothesis is explained in a **Joint WHO-China study report**.
- It identifies a SARS-related coronavirus in a (horseshoe) bat (SARSr-CoV; RaTG13).
 - SARS-CoV-2 virus has 96.2% genomic similarity to this.
- The novel coronavirus is less similar to the genome of viruses that have caused other epidemics such as SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and MERS (Middle East respiratory syndrome).
- The higher infectivity of SARS-CoV-2 is attributed to the unique insertion of four amino acids in its spike protein that makes it more efficient.
- Their arguments are based on genetic differences between the viruses:
 - While the RaTG13 in bats is similar to SARS-CoV-2, the receptor binding domain (RBD) of the spike (the RBD protein binds to the ACE2 receptor) is divergent for the two.
 - RaTG13's RBD appears less efficient.
 - It is on the basis of this natural origin hypothesis, it was concluded that natural selection on a human or human-like host appeared to facilitate optimal binding of the spike protein of the novel coronavirus with ACE2 receptors. This ruled out the lab-leak hypothesis.
 - It is also believed that a virus was acquired by humans, and it became more efficient as it spread among humans during a certain phase that remains undetected.

2. Serosurvey learnings

Context:

- Since the pandemic began in 2020, the **Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR)** conducted **three countrywide serosurveys** to measure the spread of infection due to the SARS-CoV-2 virus.
- The third survey showed that 21.5% of the population had been exposed to the virus.
- ICMR is **unlikely to immediately undertake a fourth national serology survey**.

Serological surveys:

- Serological surveys are usually used to quantify the proportion of people or animals in a population positive for a specific pathogen.

- Antibodies are measured from the blood samples from participants to check past exposure to the virus.
- The prominent objective behind such surveys is to check for levels of 'herd immunity', or if 60%-70% of the population have encountered the infection.
 - This level of exposure is believed to be effective in protecting the rest of those uninfected.

Can serology surveys reveal more than just exposure?

- The second serology survey did point to an increase in infections in rural India and hence a risk of infection — as the second wave underlined.
- The specific blood-analysis tests, called assays, can be used to check if antibodies produced by the body are targeting the spike region of the coronavirus or an inner envelope containing its genetic material called the nucleocapsid.
 - The antibodies against the spike are believed to be more relevant to preventing future infections and hence a better proxy for immunity.
- This can also provide inputs for improving vaccines.

Why is the ICMR not likely to conduct a fourth serology survey?

- Serosurveys **lose their scientific relevance** when **vaccination starts** in the population.
 - The antibodies that are triggered after a SARS-CoV-2 virus infection are structurally indistinguishable from those after one is vaccinated.
- Besides, a serology survey is a logistically demanding exercise.
 - Trained phlebotomists have to be available and dedicated laboratories have to earmarked to analyse the blood work.
 - This would also require extensive inputs from the districts.
- Apart from the infections, the focus at the moment must be on vaccination.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. The Centre-WhatsApp tussle over new IT rules

This topic has been covered in [UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis. May 27th, 2021 CNA.](#)

F. Prelims Facts

Nothing here for today!!!

G. Tidbits

1. IIT-Hyderabad develops oral solution for black fungus

Context:

Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology, Hyderabad (IIT-H), have approved the **mass production of an oral solution to treat black fungus.**

- At present, **Kala Azar (visceral leishmaniasis) treatment** is being used for black fungus and other fungus in the country.
- The oral solution developed is **made free from intellectual property** so that it can be mass produced and is made affordable and available to all.

2. Declining forest bird species in Western Himalaya

What's in News?

A **study** that analysed natural oak-dominated forests and modified forests in the State of Uttarakhand has noted that there was a **drastic loss of bird species in all modified landscapes**.

- The State of Uttarakhand is home to the Western Himalayan temperate forests which harbour a large number of endemic bird species.

Key Findings:

- The results of the study showed that there was a **low diversity of species in monoculture areas and urban sites**.
- They also noted a **drastic loss of pollinator birds and insectivores** in the degraded forests, monocultures and urbanised sites.
- It saw a **strong decline in some of the habitat guilds** in the areas that experienced land-use change.
 - Habitat guilds are **groups of bird species that have common habitat preferences**.
- Recognised oak forest specialists such as rufous-bellied woodpecker, greater yellownape, rufous sibia, white-throated laughingthrush and black-faced warbler dropped out of the modified land areas .
- It was noted that **two species (rufous-bellied woodpecker and greater yellownape)** showed great potential as **indicators of forest quality** as they were most likely to be found in dense canopied forests with larger and taller trees.

3. 'Coast Guard will get more responsibilities'

What's in News?

Offshore Patrol Vessel Sajag was **commissioned into the Coast Guard**.

- This is **third of five OPVs indigenously designed** and built by the **Goa Shipyard Limited**.

Note:

- The concept of forming the Coast Guard was conceived **after the 1971 war**, when it was assessed, that **maritime borders are equally vital as land borders**.
- The blueprint for a **multi-dimension Coast Guard was conceived by** the visionary **Rustamji Committee**.
- Coast Guard plays a critical role in **anti-smuggling and anti-narcotics, both nationally and internationally**.

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q 1. Which of the following species are most likely to be seen at the Sundarbans?

1. Indian python
2. Irrawaddy dolphin
3. Hangul
4. Batagur baska

Select the correct option from below:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The Hangul is also known as the Kashmir stag. It is native to Kashmir and is found in dense riverine forests in the high valleys and mountains of the Kashmir Valley and northern Chamba district in Himachal Pradesh.
- The Sundarbans forest is among the largest mangrove forest ecosystem in the world. It is home to Indian python, Batagur baska (Northern river terrapin-a species of riverine turtle), Irrawaddy dolphins, Estuarine Crocodile and Royal Bengal Tiger among the others.

Q 2. Consider the following:

1. Batagur baska
2. Irrawaddy dolphins
3. Gharial

Which of the above species is/are Critically Endangered?

- a. Only 1
- b. 1 & 2
- c. 1 & 3
- d. 2 & 3

Answer: c

Explanation:

IUCN classification:

- Batagur baska – Critically Endangered
- Irrawaddy dolphins – Endangered
- Gharial – Critically Endangered

Q 3: Consider the following statements:

1. The Comptroller and Auditor General is the sole authority prescribed in the Constitution entrusted with the responsibility of audit of accounts of the Union and of the States.
2. The Executive does not have powers of direction in relation to Comptroller and Auditor General's audit mandate and its execution.
3. Audit is required to report only significant cases of irregularity and breach of rules, regulations and orders.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Comptroller and Auditor General is the sole authority prescribed in the Constitution entrusted with the responsibility of audit of accounts of the Union and of the States.
- The Executive does not have powers of direction in relation to Comptroller and Auditor General's audit mandate and its execution.
- Audit is required to report not only significant cases of irregularity and breach of rules, regulations and orders but also – all the matters which, in the judgment of the Audit, appears to involve significant unnecessary, excessive, extravagant or wasteful expenditure of public money and resources despite compliance with the rules, regulations and orders or expenditure that has not yielded the intended outputs and/or outcomes.

Q 4: YUVA, recently seen in news, is:

- a. a skill development program for youth below the age of 30
- b. an Author Mentorship programme to train young and budding authors
- c. a National Scheme of Incentive to Girls for Secondary Education
- d. none of the Above

Answer: b

Explanation:

- YUVA (Young, Upcoming and Versatile Authors) is an Author Mentorship programme to train young and budding authors (below 30 years of age) in order to promote reading, writing and book culture in the country, and project India and Indian writings globally.
- It was launched by the Department of Higher Education as a scheme Mentoring Young Authors.
- The National Book Trust, India under the Ministry of Education is the Implementing Agency.

Q5. Which of the following is/are the indicator/indicators used by IFPRI to compute the Global Hunger Index Report? (UPSC 2016)

1. Undernourishment
2. Child stunting
3. Child mortality

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

Global Health Index (GHI) ranks countries on a 100 point scale, 0 representing zero/no hunger. The GHI scores are based on four indicators.

1. Undernourishment: the share of the population whose caloric intake is insufficient.
2. Child Stunting: the share of children under the age of five who have low height for their age.
3. Child Wasting: the share of children under the age of five who have low weight for their height.
4. Child Mortality: the mortality rate of children under the age of five (a reflection of the fatal mix of inadequate nutrition and unhealthy environments).

Taken together, the component indicators reflect deficiencies in calories as well as in micronutrients. Thus, the GHI reflects both aspects of hunger (undernutrition and malnutrition).

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Serological survey offers key insights into the changing dynamics of SARS-CoV-2 infection and allows policymakers to make informed decisions. Comment. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2, Health]
2. Discuss the importance of understanding Covid's origin and suggest measures to prevent the spread of similar infections in the future. (10 Marks, 150 Words)[GS-2,Health].