

16 June 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Delhi riots: 3 student activists get bail

Context:

The **Delhi High Court** granted bail to three students of Jawaharlal Nehru University and Jamia Millia Islamia arrested under the **Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA)** in connection with the northeast Delhi riots in 2020.

Details:

- The court criticised the **Delhi Police** for casually invoking provisions of **UAPA** against the three accused noting that the **line between the constitutionally guaranteed “right to protest” and “terrorist activity” had been blurred.**
 - The three accused students were protesting against the enactment of the **Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA).**
- The court remarked that, in spite of the fact that the **definition of ‘terrorist act’ in UAPA is wide and somewhat vague**, the phrase **‘terrorist act’ cannot be permitted to be casually applied to criminal acts** that fall squarely within the definition of conventional offences.
- The court cautioned that imposing extremely grave and serious penal provisions engrafted in **sections 15, 17 and 18 of the UAPA upon people would undermine the intent and purpose of the law.**

UAPA’s origin:

- The **‘terrorist act’**, including conspiracy and act preparatory to the commission of a terrorist act, were **brought within the purview of UAPA by an amendment made in 2004** when the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) was repealed.
- **POTA’s precursor, the Terrorist & Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA)** was repealed in 1995.

Read more on [Unlawful Activities \(Prevention\) Amendment Act – Background, Features and Concerns](#)

Defining ‘terrorism’:

- To understand the **concept and construction of ‘terrorism’**, the High Court referred to various Supreme Court (SC) judgments where the issue has already been dealt with.
- In Hitendra Vishnu Thakur versus State of Maharashtra case, SC said:
 - **“A ‘terrorist’ activity does not merely arise by causing disturbance of law and order or of public order.** The fallout of the intended activity must be such that it travels beyond the capacity of the ordinary law enforcement agencies to tackle it under the ordinary penal law.
 - **“Every terrorist may be a criminal but every criminal cannot be given the label of a ‘terrorist’ only to set in motion the more stringent provisions of TADA.”**

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. SC closes trial against Italian marines

Context:

The Supreme Court ordered the **closure of court proceedings in India against the two Italian marines** who in 2012 allegedly killed two fishermen off the Kerala coast after mistaking them for pirates.

- According to the decision of the [International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea \(ITLOS\)](#), the **duo would be tried in Italy.**

This topic has been covered in [June 12th, 2021 CNA.](#)

Category: HEALTH

1. Research must follow protocol, says Ministry

Context:

To a question on a probe into a **filovirus study of bats in Nagaland** undertaken by the Bengaluru-based NCBS and TIFR, the Health Ministry said that **all research work has to follow a process and action will be taken if protocols are not followed.**

This issue has been covered in [June 15th, 2021 CNA.](#)

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. FCI rice to be used for ethanol production

Context:

The Central government has allocated 78,000 tonnes of rice procured for food security purposes to be diverted to ethanol production at a subsidised rate of ₹20 a kg.

- However, the share of rice in ethanol production is minuscule and **maize would form the primary feedstock for grain-based ethanol production.**

Details:

- This is part of the government's plan to **double distilling capacities by 2025**, partly by **encouraging an increase in the share of grain-based ethanol production** from the current focus on molasses-based production.
- Earlier, a road map advancing the target date for achieving 20% blending of ethanol in petrol by five years to 2025 was presented.
 - **The last two years have seen blending levels of around 5%.**
- The centre is **targeting an ethanol production of 1,500 crore litres by 2025**, out of which, **740 crore litres, would be from grain-based distilleries**, with the remainder coming from sugar-based distilleries.

- Currently, about a third of the 710-crore litre ethanol production capacity comes from grains.
- Only 38 crore litres of grain-based ethanol is used for fuel.

Issue:

- It is believed that it is unethical as **millions of migrant, daily wage, unorganised sector and self-employed workers face a dire shortage of food required even for minimum sustenance**, apart from other deprivations of adequate shelter, monetary support for basic needs, and protection from COVID-19 disease.
- Critics assert that converting rice stocks into ethanol under the nose of hungry people is unacceptable.

Ethanol:

- Ethanol is a **biofuel and a common by-product of biomass left by agricultural feedstock** such as **corn, sugarcane, hemp, potato, etc.**
- **It is produced mainly from molasses**, a byproduct of sugar manufacture.
- **Ethanol is basically alcohol of 99%-plus purity**, which can be used for blending with petrol.
- Ethanol being a less polluting fuel will **cut down carbon emissions**.

Read more on “Ethanol Blending” covered in [UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis. January 29th, 2021.](#)

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Needed: full disclosure on electoral bonds

Background:

PIL against Electoral bonds:

- **A Public Interest Litigation (PIL) was filed in the Supreme Court by the Association of Democratic Reforms (ADR)**, to stay the sale of a new set of electoral bonds before the recently held Assembly elections. The ADR PIL had challenged electoral bonds as being unconstitutional.
- The Supreme Court while **downplaying the concerns of the corrupting influence of anonymous corporate and foreign money had refused to stay the sale of [electoral bonds](#)**.

For more information on this development refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 27th Mar 2021](#)

- Instead, the Supreme Court expressing doubts over the absolute anonymity of the electoral bonds had reasoned that the available information in the public domain could be used to ascertain political donations.

Concerns with the SC's observations:

- The article argues against the above Supreme Court's suggestion based on the following facts.
 - Notably, the annual reports of all the potential donor companies and firms are **not readily accessible on the website of the Ministry of Corporate Affairs**.
 - Also private firms, unlike companies, have **no regulatory mandate to submit their annual reports** except for filing their annual tax returns, since their functioning is regulated by Acts other than the [Companies Act of 2013](#).
 - Many registered companies while filing their annual financial statements, **do not disclose political donations**.
 - The company statements might have a total aggregate amount of all donations, including philanthropic ones. **Nowhere are donations to specific political parties required to be mentioned**.
 - The Finance Bill of 2017 amended Section 182 of the Companies Act of 2013 to remove the requirement for declaring disaggregated donations to political parties.
 - That political **parties do not need to disclose their electoral bond donors** makes it extremely difficult to track political donations.
 - The political parties are only required to **submit annual audit reports with a total of all donations received via electoral bonds**. This makes it very difficult to match a donation of a company to that received by a political party as only aggregate amounts are available.
 - Even these annual audit reports are **submitted with great delays**.
 - No ordinary person has the resources/time to navigate through documents available on government websites or analyze the income tax returns of companies to ascertain the political donations as suggested by the Supreme Court.
 - Hence, the "match the following" suggestion of the Supreme Court to ascertain political donations is both impractical and incorrect.

Recommendations:

- Keeping in the **spirit of the Right to Information (RTI) Act of 2005** which mandates easier access to information held by public authorities, companies and political parties should **voluntarily disclose the identity of recipients and donors**.
- Alternatively, the **Supreme Court or the legislature could push for full and real-time disclosure**, to truly realize the benefit of transparency and accountability as envisaged through the electoral bond scheme.

For more information on this topic refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 23rd Nov 2019](#)

Concerns over Electoral Bonds:

A new form of anonymity:

- The introduction of electoral bonds has resulted in the anonymity of thousands of crores of political donations and thus has greatly **reduced public and legislative oversight over such donations.**

Skewed framework:

- The current electoral bond framework makes it **possible for the ruling party via the State Bank of India (SBI) to have a full account of all donations** being made via electoral bonds, to itself and to Opposition parties.
- However the parliament, the [Election Commission](#) and the Opposition parties do not have this information, nor do the public. This will invariably lead to a situation where the potential donors will be pushed to donate towards the ruling party.

Against the spirit of electoral process:

- The electoral bonds give **political power to companies, wealthy individual donors, and foreign entities**, thus diluting the principle of one voter – one vote – one value.
- Every vote is not equally valuable if companies **can influence policies** through hidden donations.

For more information on this topic refer to:

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

Other concerns associated with political funding:

Foreign funding:

- In 2016 and 2018, amendments were made to the [Foreign Contribution \(Regulation\) Act \(FCRA\)](#) through the annual Finance Bills, with retrospective effect. These amendments **enabled Indian subsidiaries of foreign companies to make donations to political parties.**
- These amendments in conjunction with electoral bonds allow anonymous financing by foreign entities **opening Indian elections to the influence of foreign corporate and political donors.**

Changes in corporate funding framework:

- Earlier, only profit-making domestic companies could contribute to political parties. However, post some amendments now **even loss-making companies can contribute to political parties.**
- This could lead to an eventuality where Indian political parties could be fully funded by foreign entity/domestic pressure groups through a **shell company.**

Category: ECONOMY

1. Embracing cryptocurrency

Context:

- Recently, **El Salvador became the first country in the world to adopt bitcoin as legal tender.**

For information on this topic refer to:

UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 13th June 2021

- In this context, the **article argues for a more favourable approach towards cryptocurrency in India.**

Background:

India's stand on Cryptocurrency:

- Post-2010, the cryptocurrency market in India developed in a largely laissez-faire regulatory space and this has established a **substantial trading market for cryptocurrencies in India.**
- The **RBI had banned cryptocurrency trading in 2018**, based on concerns over the potential impact the cryptocurrencies could have on the financial stability in the economy.
 - These fears were based on cryptocurrencies' volatility, their susceptibility to hacking, and the fear that they could potentially facilitate criminal activities such as money laundering, terrorist financing and tax evasion.
- **The Supreme Court had asked the Centre in 2019 to frame policies for cryptocurrencies, and in 2020, struck down the curbs imposed by the RBI** while stopping short of commenting on the legal nature of cryptocurrencies.
 - The court reasoned that there were alternative regulatory measures short of an outright ban through which the RBI could have achieved its objective of curbing the risks associated with cryptocurrency trading.
- A **high-level inter-ministerial committee (IMC)** was constituted under the chairmanship of the economic affairs secretary on digital currencies. The government had expressed its openness to evaluate and explore new technologies, including cryptocurrencies, for improving governance.

For related information refer to:

UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 31st Jan 2021

- **The draft Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill, 2021** proposes to **criminalize all private cryptocurrencies** while also laying down the **regulatory framework for an RBI-backed digital currency.**
 - The purported reason for the prohibition of private cryptocurrencies is the **imprecise legal nature of cryptocurrencies in India** and the **lack of legal framework** for the regulatory bodies to directly regulate private cryptocurrencies.

Way forward:

Need for legal definition of cryptocurrency and a regulatory framework:

- The fact that cryptocurrency has no legal classification should not be the impetus to prohibit its use in India rather the RBI should come up with an appropriate regulatory framework for cryptocurrencies.
- The methodology adopted in countries like the U.K., Singapore and the U.S could offer valuable lessons for India in this regard.

- **The U.K. has classified cryptocurrency as property** and this has helped pave the way for cryptocurrencies to be covered within a regulated legal framework of the economy.
- **The amenability of cryptocurrency transactions to the contract law framework in Singapore** has helped establish a legal framework for cryptocurrency trading.
- **The trade in cryptocurrency is taxed in the U.S.** which has helped in the oversight and regulation of cryptocurrency trading.

Balanced regulation:

- There is a need for a balanced regulation of the cryptocurrency which could allow private individuals the freedom to harness a powerful new technology like blockchain technology-based digital currency with appropriate regulatory standards.
- Such permissive regulation **recognises the freedom of choice given to people** for using a medium of exchange other than a central bank-backed fiat currency.
- Such an approach would be in line with the rising global trend of embracing cryptocurrencies that **permit the growth of the cryptocurrency market subject to certain safeguards.**

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. America's mistakes in the 'forever war'

- In the light of the scheduled **withdrawal of the U.S. armed forces from Afghanistan**, the article analyzes the **possible consequences** of this ill-timed move of the U.S. **for Afghanistan and the adjoining region** as well as the world at large.

For related information on this issue refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 25th May 2021](#)

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis of 11th March 2021](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. IICT inks pact with pharma firm for 2-DG

What's in News?

CSIR-Indian Institute of Chemical Technology Hyderabad (IICT) and a Bengaluru-based integrated biopharmaceutical company, signed an agreement for technology transfer and manufacture of the anti-COVID drug **2-DG or 2-Deoxy-D-Glucose**.

- Studies have shown that the oral drug **2-DG has demonstrated quick recovery and reduction in oxygen dependence** among **moderately and severely affected patients**.

2-Deoxy-D-Glucose:

- The 2 DG drug, like glucose, **spreads through the body, reaches the virus-infected cells** and **prevents virus growth** by stopping viral synthesis and destroys the protein's energy production.

- The drug also **works on virus infection spread into lungs** which help us to decrease patients' dependability on oxygen.
- The drug is known for **selective accumulation in virally infected cells**.

G. Tidbits

1. Taiwan reports 'largest' incursion by Chinese forces

What's in News?

According to the Government of Taiwan, as many as 28 Chinese air force aircraft, including fighters and nuclear-capable bombers, entered Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ).

- It is the **largest reported incursion** to date.
- Taiwan has complained of repeated missions by China's air force concentrated in the southwestern part of its air defence zone **near the Taiwan-controlled Pratas Islands**.
- The news comes after the **Group of Seven leaders issued a joint statement scolding China and underscored the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait**.

One China Policy:

- The One China policy recognizes the long-held position in Beijing that **there is only one China, and that Taiwan is a part of that**.
- According to the One-China policy: **Any country wishing to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing must acknowledge there is only "One China" and sever all formal ties with Taiwan**.

Also read: [China Vs Taiwan: RSTV Big Picture](#)

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q.1 Which of the following cities are located in the Brahmaputra Valley?

1. Guwahati
2. Dibrugarh
3. Aizwal
4. Tezpur

Options:-

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Nagaon, Bongaigaon, Tinsukia, Tezpur are the cities are located in the Brahmaputra Valley.

Q.2 Which of the following statements is/are correct w.r.t Humayun's tomb?

1. The construction of Humayun's tomb was commissioned by Humayun's son Akbar.
2. The tomb has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
3. The last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar took refuge here, during the Mutiny of 1857, before being exiled to Rangoon.

Options:-

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

- The construction of Humayun's tomb was commissioned by Bega Begum, Humayun's Persian wife and chief consort in 1565 AD, nine years after the Emperor's death.
- It was completed in 1572 AD under the patronage of the Mughal Emperor Akbar.
- The tomb was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1993.
- The last Mughal Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar took refuge here, during the Mutiny of 1857, before being exiled to Rangoon.

Q.3 'Christchurch Call to Action Summit' is related to -

- a. Tackling GHG emissions linked to cryptocurrency mining
- b. Curbing online dissemination of extremist content
- c. Preventing oil spills and marine disasters
- d. Promoting climate-resilient agricultural practices

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The Christchurch Call to Action Summit was a political summit started by New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern in Paris, France, after the Christchurch mosque shootings of 15 March 2019.
- The summit brings together leaders from signatory governments, tech companies, and civil society to discuss efforts to address terrorist and violent extremist content online.

- The Christchurch Call to Action Summit is related to curbing online dissemination of extremist content.

Q.4 Mayun island/Perim island, recently seen in news, is located near which crucial maritime chokepoint?

- a. Strait of Malacca
- b. Suez Canal
- c. Bab-el-Mandeb Strait
- d. Strait of Hormuz

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Mayun island/Perim island, recently seen in news, is located near Bab-el-Mandeb Strait near Yemen.
- It is a volcanic island in the Strait of Mandeb at the south entrance into the Red Sea, off the southwest coast of Yemen.
- The location of the island is extremely strategic from the point of view of cargo shipments and war ammunition. It is a crucial maritime chokepoint.

Q5. Consider the following in respect of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS): (UPSC 2017)

1. Inaugural IONS was held in India in 2015 under the chairmanship of the Indian Navy.
2. IONS is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime cooperation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- The 'Indian Ocean Naval Symposium' (IONS) is a voluntary initiative that seeks to increase maritime co-operation among navies of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region and enhance regional security.
- Inaugural IONS was held in India in 2008 under the chairmanship of the Indian Navy.

Year	Edition	Host	Dates
2008	1st	 India	14–16 February 2008
2010	2nd	 United Arab Emirates	10–12 May 2010
2012	3rd	 South Africa	10–14 April 2012
2014	4th	 Australia	26 March 2014
2016	5th	 Bangladesh	11–13 January 2016
2018	6th	 Iran	22–25 April 2018
2020	7th	 Mayotte and Réunion	April 2020

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967 is India's primary legal weapon against terrorism. But its application has run into controversies on the grounds of violation of fundamental rights. Critically discuss. (250 words; 15 marks) [GS-2, Polity and Governance].
2. The U.S. misread the situation in Afghanistan with the long war, now leaving the Taliban at the height of their influence. Examine. (250 words; 15 marks) [GS-2, International Relations].