

23 Jun 2021: UPSC Exam Comprehensive News Analysis

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B. GS 2 Related

Category: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

1. Afghan violence has risen: Jaishankar

Context:

- Virtual meeting of the [UN Security Council](#) on Afghanistan.

Background:

- Talks between the Afghanistan government and the Taliban have reached a stalemate.
- **Afghanistan has seen an increasing level of violence in recent months, as the Taliban makes territorial gains.** Not only has the Taliban captured more territory in recent months but it also seems poised to take over key cities once the foreign troops pull out.
 - The increase in violence has been reported by the **UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)**.
- There has been increased violence against women, girls and ethnic and religious minorities and Afghan security forces.

Details:

- The Indian External Affairs Minister has expressed deep anguish at the increasing level of violence in Afghanistan.
- While **reiterating India's support for the Intra-Afghan negotiations**, the External Affairs Minister has **called for the United Nations to play a "leading role" in the reconciliation process.**
- The minister has raised concerns over Afghanistan being used by terrorist groups to launch attacks on other countries and called for **ending any terrorist safe havens and terrorist supply chains that aid cross border terrorism.**
 - This comes amid reports of the [Taliban](#) keeping its links with the al-Qaeda and Pakistan-based terror groups including the Lashkar-e-Toiba and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan.
- While acknowledging the **significance of the economic development of Afghanistan**, India has stressed the need to ensure continued trade to and from Afghanistan via unhindered access to the high seas.

2. At UNHRC, 'grave concerns' raised over Xinjiang

Context:

- Ongoing **47th session of the [UN Human Rights Council \(UNHRC\)](#) in Geneva.**

Details:

- More than 40 countries led by Canada voiced **grave concerns about China's actions in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, Hong Kong and Tibet.**
 - This comes amid reports of arbitrary detention of over a million people in Xinjiang, widespread surveillance of Uighurs and members of other minorities and **restrictions on fundamental freedoms** and Uighur culture. There have also been reports of **torture and inhumane treatment or punishment**, forced sterilisation, sexual and gender-based violence, and forced separation of children from their parents.

- The joint statement urged China to give the UN rights chief and other independent observers access to Xinjiang.

Category: GOVERNANCE

1. 'Tying reforms, incentives helped widen adoption'

Background:

Reform linked additional borrowing limits:

- In May 2020, as part of the **Aatmanirbhar Bharat package**, the Centre had announced that state governments would be allowed enhanced borrowing for 2020-21. **An extra 2% of GSDP (gross state domestic product) was allowed**, of which 1% was made conditional on the implementation of certain economic reforms.
- The four citizen-centric areas for reforms identified were:
 - Implementation of [One Nation One Ration Card System](#)
 - Ease of doing business reform
 - Urban local body/utility reforms
 - Power sector reforms.

Details:

- Many states have implemented the proposed reforms.
- Twenty-three States have availed of additional borrowings of ₹1.06 lakh crore out of a potential ₹14 lakh crore.

Significance:

Shift in approach:

- The reform-linked borrowing by states amounts to a new model of public finance in India.
- This approach marks a shift from a model of 'reforms by stealth and compulsion' to a **new model of 'reforms by conviction and incentives'**, which would be more efficient and effective.

Nudge for reforms:

- In a **country plagued by undue operational delays of schemes and reforms**, this nudge for reform is a much welcome move. Experts have suggested that without the incentive of additional funds, the enactment of the proposed policies would have taken years.

Public friendly reforms:

- The proposed reforms were both directly and indirectly linked to **improving the ease of living for the public.**

Promoting fiscal sustainability:

- This model promoted fiscal sustainability in the long run while also raising adequate resources for public welfare.

C. GS 3 Related

Category: ENVIRONMENT AND ECOLOGY

1. 8 rare pygmy hogs released in Manas National Park

Context:

- Release of captive-bred pygmy hogs into Manas National Park of western Assam.

Pygmy hog:

- **Pygmy hogs (*porcula salvania*)** are one of the **world's rarest and smallest wild pigs.**
- The pygmy hog is native to dense alluvial grasslands in the southern foothills of the Himalayas. **Endemic to India**, they are restricted to very few locations around **Manas National Park in north-western Assam.**
 - Once found along a narrow strip of tall and wet grassland plains on the Himalayan foothills – from Uttar Pradesh to Assam, through Nepal's terai areas and Bengal's duars – it was thought to have become extinct in the 1960s. But in 1971 it was "re-discovered" with a small population in the Barnadi Wildlife Sanctuary.

Threat:

- With just around 250 animals in the wild, the **pygmy hog is one of the world's most threatened mammals.**
- The main threats pygmy hogs face are **loss and degradation of their grassland habitat** due to human settlements, agricultural encroachments, **dry-season burning of grasslands, livestock grazing, commercial forestry and flood control schemes.** These constitute major threats to their survival.

Conservation status:

- Due to a **small wild population**, estimated at less than 250 individuals, and a **highly restricted range**, the pygmy hog is **currently listed as 'Critically Endangered'** on the [IUCN Red List](#) of Threatened Species.
- The pygmy hog is designated as a Schedule I species in India under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

Details:

- This is the second batch of captive-bred pygmy hogs to have been reintroduced into the wild under the **Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme (PHCP)** in a year.
 - The Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme aims to increase the population of pygmy hogs in the wild.
 - The Pygmy Hog Conservation Programme (PHCP) follows a **two-pronged action plan: conservation breeding** of the animal against possible early extinction and **re-introduction** in selected sites, and **habitat management**.
 - The reintroduction of captive hogs in the wild began in 2008. Initially, three Protected Areas in their historical distribution range in Assam were selected including Sonai-Rupai Wildlife Sanctuary, Orang National Park and Barnadi Wildlife Sanctuary.
- The number of pygmy hogs reintroduced into the wild under the PHCP has been more than their current original global wild population. Thus the present efforts will go a long way in bringing back the pygmy hog from near extinction.

Significance:

Restoration of grasslands:

- **The Pygmy Hogs are intrinsic to the health of grasslands.** Hence their conservation is a must for better protection and restoration of alluvial grasslands in the southern foothills of the Himalayas.
- Given the fact that pygmy hogs choose dense grasslands as their habitat, **conservation efforts directed at pygmy hogs will also help improve the health of the grassland ecosystem in the area.**
- Wet grasslands apart from serving as **habitat to endangered species** like the one-horned rhino, tiger, hog deer, eastern barasingha, water buffalo, hispid hare, and the Bengal florican, also serve as **buffer against floods** in the monsoons, while maintaining high groundwater level in the dry season, thereby benefitting agriculture and the farming community that live on its fringes.

Indicator species of grassland ecosystem:

- The pygmy hog is an indicator species. Its **presence reflects the health of its primary habitat, the tall, wet grasslands of the Terai.**
 - Indicator species are animals, plants, or microorganism that **reflect the biotic or abiotic state of an environment**; reveal evidence for the impacts of environmental change; or indicate the diversity of other species.
 - Indicator species serves as a measure of the environmental conditions that exist in a given locale and are thus **used to monitor changes in the environment.**

- Examples - greasewood indicates saline soil; mosses often indicate acid soil. Tubifex worms indicate oxygen-poor and stagnant water unfit to drink.

Additional information:

- *Haematopinus oliveri*, known commonly as the **pygmy hog-sucking louse**, is a **critically endangered species**. It is an ectoparasite found only on another critically endangered species, the pygmy hog.

Category: DEFENCE AND SECURITY

1. 4 theatre commands likely this year

Context:

- The **meeting of the high-level committee** consisting of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), Vice Chiefs of the three services, Chief of Integrated Defence Staff and representatives from the Ministries of Defence, Home and Finance.
 - The committee had been formed for **consultations on the creation of integrated tri-service theatre commands**.

For information on integrated theatre commands refer to [Integrated Theatre Commands](#)

Details:

- As per official sources, the Prime Minister is expected to make an announcement on four proposed commands which are likely to be raised by year-end.
 - An **air defence command, maritime theatre command, integrated eastern theatre command and integrated western theatre command** are on the anvil.
- As against the traditional approach of just coordinating and syncing of operations between the various services, integrated theatre command will also require **integrated joint planning among the services**.
- The operational functions will shift to theatre commands, which will involve the creation of **joint structures in the headquarters of Integrated Defence Command**.

For related information on significance, challenges and measures needed to ensure smooth implementation of integrated theatre commands refer to the following article:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis 28th Feb 2020](#)

D. GS 4 Related

Nothing here for today!!!

E. Editorials

Category: ECONOMY

1. Policy creep

Context:

- **Amendments suggested to the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020** by the Department of Consumer Affairs.

For detailed information on the proposed amendments refer to the following link:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis 22nd June 2021](#)

Background:

- **E-commerce has been witnessing tremendous growth in recent times.** The Indian e-commerce market is expected to grow to US\$ 200 billion by 2026.
- The increasing prominence of e-commerce along with a rise in associated consumer complaints indicated the **need to regulate the booming sector.**
- The [Consumer Protection Act, 2019](#) came into force in July 2020 and the **Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules, 2020**, were subsequently notified.

For information on the Consumer Protection (E-commerce) Rules, 2020 refer to:

[UPSC Comprehensive News Analysis 21st July 2020](#)

Arguments in favour:

Regulating the e-commerce platforms:

- There have been concerns over the business practices of the leading e-commerce platforms in India.
 - They have been accused of having **pricing practices** that are skewed to favour select sellers on their platforms.
 - Their **deep discounting policies** have adversely impacted offline retailers and have been termed as **unfair trade practice.**
- The proposed amendments will further **strengthen the regulatory regime to curb the prevalent unfair trade practices.**
- The proposed amendments will bring the much-desired **transparency in the e-commerce platforms** and help prevent unfair trade practices by them.
- The ban on flash sales and deep discounting would **encourage free and fair competition in the market.**

Protecting consumer interests:

- There has been a massive increase in the number of consumer complaints against e-commerce platforms.
 - **E-commerce tops the National Consumer Helpline's complaints chart.**
- The amendments are aimed at protecting the interests of consumers.
- The **provisions on mis-selling and fall back liability** empower the customers against the e-commerce platforms to a great extent.
 - Mis-selling is selling goods and services by deliberate misrepresentation of information.

Arguments against:

Risks of over-regulation:

- The article argues that the draft e-commerce amendments are indicative of the Government's increasing keenness to exercise greater oversight over online platforms and warns that such an approach may **prove detrimental in the longer run.**
- **Overregulation risks retarding growth and job creation** in the hitherto expanding e-commerce sector.

Impact on platforms:

- The latest amendments aimed at preventing direct selling would also adversely impact several platforms that retail products supplied by vendors with arm's length ties. This could have a **detrimental impact on their functioning** thus adversely affecting not just the prospects of the company but also that of the lakhs of employees that these platforms employ.

Category: POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

1. Countering a political act that has a legal garb

Context:

- Aisha Sultana, a filmmaker from Lakshadweep has been recently booked for alleged offences of [sedition](#) and statements prejudicial to national integrity.
- In this context, the article expresses concerns over the misuse of the sedition provision in the Indian Penal Code.
- Sedition is a punishable offence under Section 124A of the [Indian Penal Code \(IPC\)](#).

Concerns:

Rising number of cases:

- As per the **National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)**, between 2016 and 2019 there was a 160% increase in the registration of sedition cases whereas the conviction rate during this period fell from

33.3% to 3.3%. The low conviction might be indicative of the **arbitrary accusation of a citizen of sedition without any legal or factual foundation.**

Not in line with the judicial precedents:

- The sedition provisions are being **invoked solely based on word usage.**
- This is not in line with the judicial observations in landmark cases like **Kedar Nath Singh (1962)** which said that incitement to violence is the gist of the offence of sedition and the **Vinod Dua (2021) case**, where the Court said that a journalist cannot be booked for sedition for expressing dissent.

Tool of political vendetta:

- There are concerns over misuse of the sedition provisions against political opponents.

Right to freedom of expression:

- A person must be given the right to fully express oneself even if it involves expression of his disaffection towards the state so long as he/she does not contemplate, promote, or incite violence or social disturbance.
- The use of sedition provisions seems **incongruous with liberal democratic attitudes.**

Conclusion:

- The article calls for **judicial activism** wherein the Supreme Court of India and the High Courts take suo motu cognisance of the misuse of sedition provisions.

For detailed information on the Law of Sedition in India & Freedom of Expression, watch the following video:

[*The Law of Sedition in India & Freedom of Expression*](#)

F. Prelims Facts

1. Papikonda park getting ready for tiger census

Papikonda National Park:

- Papikonda National Park is located in the East Godavari and West Godavari districts of **Andhra Pradesh.**
- It is an **Important Bird and Biodiversity Area** and home to some endangered species of flora and fauna.
- **Godavari River flows through the national park.**

- **The Polavaram irrigation project** once completed will submerge parts of the national park.

Context:

- Preparations for the All India Tiger Estimation-2022 in Papikonda National Park.

2. Jagan welcomes Vamsadhara verdict

River Vamsadhara:

- River Vamsadhara is an important **east-flowing river** between Mahanadi and Godavari, in **Southern Odisha and North Eastern Andhra Pradesh**.
- It originates in the Kalahandi district of Odisha, flows in Odisha, along its boundary with Andhra Pradesh and finally joins the Bay of Bengal at Kalingapatnam, Andhra Pradesh.
- Vamsadhara water dispute is between the states of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

Context:

- Judgment of the Vamsadhara water Tribunal.

3. U.K. liaison officer joins Navy's information centre

Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region:

- **The Indian Navy established the IFC-IOR in 2018** to effectively keep track of the shipping traffic as well as other critical developments in the region under a collaborative framework with like-minded countries.
- It will also act as a **regional repository of maritime data**. It presently has linkages with 21 partner countries and 22 multi-national agencies across the globe.
- The centre is meant for **better maritime domain awareness in the region** and it has emerged as a key hub of maritime security information relating to the Indian Ocean.
- The IFC has been **established at Gurugram, India** and is **co-located with Information Management and Analysis Centre** which is jointly administered by the Indian Navy and Indian Coast Guard.
- A small group of India's strategic partners have positioned their officials at IFC-IOR.

Context:

- A United Kingdom liaison officer has joined the Navy's Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region.

- All countries that have signed [white shipping information exchange agreements](#) with India can position liaison officers at the IFC.
- **ILOs from Australia, France, Japan and the U.S** have joined earlier. The U.K. is the 5th country to post an ILO.

4. The politics of an aerial snare

Convention on International Civil Aviation:

- **Convention on International Civil Aviation (also known as Chicago Convention)**, was signed in 1944. The Convention establishes rules of airspace, aircraft registration and safety, security, and sustainability, and details the rights of the signatories in relation to air travel.
- The [International Civil Aviation Organization \(ICAO\)](#) came into being in 1947. Subsequently, ICAO became a **specialized agency of the United Nations linked to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)**. The ICAO is charged with coordinating international air travel.

Context:

- The **forced landing of a Ryanair aircraft in Minsk** by a MiG-29 fighter jet of Belarus in an alleged move to arrest a dissident Belarussian journalist has received considerable global attention.
- There have been calls for a thorough investigation by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

G. Tidbits

1. Delta plus is a variant of concern: govt.

- The emerging delta-plus variant has been classified as a ‘variant of concern’.
 - A variant of concern (VoC) is characterised by increased infectivity, transmissibility or resistance to vaccines and treatment.
- The [World Health Organisation](#) has already classified the variant ‘delta’ (B.1.617.2) as well as offshoots — AY.1 and AY.2 — as VoC.

2. World’s first GM rubber sapling planted in Assam

- The Kerala-based Rubber Research Institute of India (RRII) has developed the **world’s first genetically modified (GM) rubber plant tailored for the climatic conditions in Northeast India**.
- The **severe cold conditions in northeast India during winter** have been found to affect the growth of young rubber plants. The GM rubber will be able to tide over such severe cold conditions.
 - **Natural rubber tree is a native of warm humid Amazon forests** and is not naturally suited for the colder conditions in the Northeast.

3. The picture is clear, it is top-down misinformation

Infodemic:

- Infodemic is defined as an **excessive amount of information** in digital and physical environments about a problem that is **typically unreliable and spreads rapidly**.

Threat posed by infodemics:

- Given that infodemics often include false and misleading material, rumours, they contribute to **spreading false information**.
- Infodemics are also **used to exploit the crisis for propaganda or for profit**.
- Mis- and disinformation can be **harmful to people's physical and mental health**.
- The infodemic that has accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic has caused confusion and risk-taking behaviours that can harm health. It also leads to **mistrust in health authorities and undermines the public health response**. Thus an infodemic can intensify or lengthen outbreaks by undermining the global response to the pandemic.
- Furthermore, disinformation is **polarizing public debate** on topics related to COVID-19; amplifying hate speech; heightening the risk of conflict, violence and human rights violations; and threatening long-term prospects for advancing democracy, human rights and social cohesion.

Infodemic management:

- Infodemic management is the systematic **use of risk- and evidence-based analysis and approaches to manage the infodemic** and reduce its impact on health behaviours during health emergencies.
- It involves:
 - Listening to community concerns and questions
 - Promoting understanding of risk and health expert advice
 - Building resilience to misinformation
 - Engaging and empowering communities to take positive action

H. UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Q1. Which of the given statements is/are correct?

1. Kerala is the largest producer of rubber in India.
2. The world's first GM Rubber was planted in Karnataka.
3. Rubber planting is eligible for carbon credits that can be obtained and sold in the Clean Development Mechanism market.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Kerala is the largest producer of rubber in India.
- The world's first GM Rubber was planted in Assam. It has been inserted with additional copies of the gene MnSOD (manganese-containing superoxide dismutase), to withstand extreme environmental stresses like cold.
- Rubber planting is eligible for carbon credits that can be obtained and sold in the Clean Development Mechanism market.

Q2. Which of the given statements with respect to Carnatic Music is/are correct?

1. Dhrupad, Tarana and Dadra are its main vocal forms.
2. The first references to Carnatic music were found in Haripala's "Sangeeta Sudhakara".
3. Purandharadasa, Tyagaraja and Muthuswami Dikshitar are referred to as the Carnatic Musical Trinity.

Options:

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

Answer: c

Explanation:

- Alapana, Niraval, Kalpanaswaram and Ragam Thana Pallavi are the main vocal forms of Carnatic Music while Dhrupad, Tarana and Dadra are the main vocal forms of Hindustani Music.
- The first references to Carnatic music were found in Haripala's "Sangeeta Sudhakara".
- Syama Shastri, Tyagaraja and Muthuswami Dikshitar are referred to as the Carnatic Musical Trinity.

Q3. The term 'Hidden hunger' seen in news best describes:

- a. Deficiency of micronutrients, such as vitamins, iron, iodine and other trace elements.
- b. Body's inability to absorb nutrients due to an infection or disease.
- c. Protein energy malnutrition due to acute deficiency of food.
- d. Deficiency of macronutrients affecting the metabolic system, growth, and development of the body.

Answer: a

Explanation:

- The word hidden hunger refers to a more insidious type of deficiency caused by eating food that is cheap and filling but deficient in essential vitamins and micronutrients.
- Hidden hunger describes deficiency of micronutrients, such as vitamins, iron, iodine and other trace elements.

Q4. Manas National Park has which of the following designations?

1. Important Bird Area
2. World Heritage Site
3. Tiger Reserve
4. Elephant Reserve
5. Biosphere Reserve

Options:

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

Answer: d

Explanation:

Manas National Park or Manas Wildlife Sanctuary is a national park, UNESCO Natural World Heritage site, a Project Tiger reserve, an elephant reserve, Important Bird Area and a biosphere reserve. It is located in Assam.

Q5. With reference to agricultural soils, consider the following statements: (UPSC 2018)

1. A high content of organic matter in soil drastically reduces its water holding capacity.
2. Soil does not play any role in the Sulphur cycle.
3. Irrigation over a period of time can contribute to the salinization of some agricultural lands.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

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

Answer: b

Explanation:

- A high content of organic matter in soil increases the soil's water holding capacity.
- Soil does play an important role in the Sulphur Cycle. Sulphur reservoir is in the soil. Also, sulphur bound in living beings is carried to the soil through decomposition and excretion. Therefore, soil is a part of the sulphur cycle.
- Irrigation over a period of time can contribute to the salinization of some agricultural lands as the water could contain some dissolved salts.

I. UPSC Mains Practice Questions

1. Critically evaluate the recently proposed amendments to the Consumer Protection (E-Commerce) Rules, 2020. (250 words; 15 marks) [GS-3, Economy].
2. Discuss the impact of misinformation spread by vested interests. (250 words; 15 marks) [GS-3, Security].